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Explaining Moldova's "Twitter Revolution that Wasn't"¹

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In 2009, Moldova experienced a dramatic and violent political upheaval that ousted longtime president Vladimir Voronin's Communist Party and replaced it with a coalition known as the Alliance for European Integration.² Much remains unclear about what actually happened. Media initially focused on the role of social networking websites,³ and the term "Twitter Revolution" has become widely used as a moniker when referring to these events.⁴ Other accounts, however, have downplayed either the role of social media⁵ or the revolutionary nature of these events as they unfolded.⁶ These

¹ This wording comes from David J. Kramer and William H. Hill, "Moldova: The Twitter Revolution that Wasn't," *OpenDemocracy*, May 28, 2009. The author is grateful to Rebecca Chamberlain-Creanga for feedback on an earlier draft and input from Alexander Schmemmann on this one, though any problems in the paper are the responsibility of the author alone. This paper grows out of a larger book project tentatively titled *Great Expectations: Patronal Politics and Regime Dynamics in Eurasia*.

² A good overview of Moldovan politics since independence is Nicu Popescu, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism," *Russian Politics and Law*, v.50, no.4, July-August 2012, pp.37-50. In February, one of the parties (the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova) announced its withdrawal from the Alliance and in March the parliament dismissed the government, leaving the country's immediate political future uncertain."

³ Particularly influential in this regard were *The New York Times*, April 7, 2009, p.1.

⁴ 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, "Moldova's 'Twitter Revolution,'" *Journal of Democracy*, v.20, no.3, July 2009, pp.136-42; Giovanni Ziccardi, *Resistance, Liberation Technology, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013) pp.27-8. An example of the moniker penetrating scholarly accounts that refer to these events only as passing comparative referents is Elena Korosteleva, "Questioning democracy promotion: Belarus' response to the 'colour revolutions,'" *Democratization*, v.19, no.1, February 2012, pp.37-59, p.52.

⁵ 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. See also Maximilian C. Forte, "This Failed Revolution, Powered by Twitter: Revisiting the Recurring Themes of the Moldova Twitter Revolution, and Raising Some New Doubts," posted on his personal "Political Activism and the Web" website, posted 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/>.

⁶ E.g., Kramer and Hill 2009. Morozov later qualified his initial exuberance: See Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011) p.3.

debates on the Internet's importance, however, contribute research primarily on patterns of Internet use, providing very little in the way of original research on 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. Accounts of post-Soviet "color revolutions" or postcommunist democratic breakthroughs sometimes refer to Moldova's events as possibly constituting another in the series, but do not attempt to treat them in any depth.⁷ For an event so dramatic in content and outcome, then, Moldova's 2009 revolution appears remarkably under-researched, leaving us without clear answers regarding the role of the Internet and without the improved understanding of patterns of revolution that a more comprehensive analysis could provide.

The present paper provides such an analysis and argues 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. Careful process-tracing of events, including the details of the April protests as well as critical events later in the year, reveal that these two crucial factors (public opinion and succession politics in the dominant political machine) were capable of generating both the mass rioting and the ouster of the Communist party that followed several months later. Among other things, this suggests that studies of social media's effects on politics must be couched in rigorous and systematic study of the larger political context in which the Internet operates.⁸

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

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.⁹ This is because, especially in societies like Moldova's where informal politics dominates and tends to revolve around competition among rival political networks,¹⁰ the patron's ability to enforce unity in his or her coalition weakens for at least two reasons. For one thing, 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.

⁷ E.g., Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Moldova's Revolution Against Cynical and Cronyist Authoritarianism," *RFE/RL Commentary*, April 13, 2009; Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid regimes After the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lincoln A. Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) pp.163, 187.

⁸ On how this fits more generally with research findings on the role of the Internet in politics, see Henry Farrell, "The Consequences of the Internet for Politics," *American Review of Political Science*, v.15, 2012, pp.35-52.

⁹ E.g., Gordon Tullock, *Autocracy* (New York: Springer, 1987). On post-Soviet countries, see Henry E. Hale, "Regime Cycles: Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *World Politics*, v.58, no.1, October 2005, pp.133-65.

¹⁰ Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, "Introduction," in Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky, eds., *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Lucan A. Way, "Pluralism by Default in Moldova," *Journal of Democracy*, v.13, no.4, October 2002, pp.127-41.

For another, since political machines in such contexts tend 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. And all these elite dynamics, in turn, can generate openings (political opportunity structure) and sources of logistical support for mass mobilization and create opportunities for it to impact politics in important ways.¹¹ 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.¹²

In the case of Moldova, incumbent president Vladimir Voronin, after his 2005 reelection, entered into his constitutionally final term in office, setting in motion many of these very dynamics. While he did not plan on leaving politics and hoped to still remain dominant beyond the election set to choose his successor as president in 2009, the fact that he was exiting the formal office of the presidency meant two things—even in a context where informal politics dominated. 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, at a minimum as the aging Voronin (who would turn 68 shortly after the regularly scheduled election) inevitably would become unable to exercise power and possibly even sooner. 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 regime, 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,

¹¹ Sidney Tarrow, “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, 1996) pp.41-61, pp.54-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.60-1.

even if the new president came from within his own party.¹³ In addition, there was the danger to his authority that such a split within Communists ranks could occur even before the elections. Here it is important to note that Moldova's president has, since 2001, been not directly elected but instead chosen by an elected parliament, and parliament was set to make its choice shortly after parliamentary elections set for April 2009. 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.¹⁴ 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 the president and members of the government."¹⁵

By one account, he compared himself explicitly to Deng Xiaoping, who long ruled despite not occupying the formally supreme office in China, and asserted that:

"Whatever I undertake after the elections, I will remain at the heart of everything that happens in the country."¹⁶

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 different forces considering challenging it or at least staking out distinct bargaining position with it. These 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, had resigned to lead his party's new delegation in the

¹³ Marc Tkaciuk, Voronin's most prominent political strategist and a top figure in the Communist Party, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

¹⁴ *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, January 28, 2009.

¹⁵ President Vladimir Voronin, interview with A. Venediktov on Ekho Moskvoy Radio, transcript published in *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 26, 2009. See also his similar remark on television: *Infotag*, December 11, 2008.

¹⁶ Dumitru Ciubasenco, editor in chief of the Russian-language newspaper *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, "Moldova's Communist Leader Seeks To Retain Hold On Power," *RFE/RL*, February 15, 2009.

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 Dorin Chirtoaca, a charismatic 28-year-old representative of the previously minor Liberal Party led by his uncle, Mihai Ghimpu, a longtime political activist and leader of the late Soviet-era national independence movement.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ The picture was similar for the council races.²⁰ The Communists were found to have deployed administrative resources at their disposal here, including media bias and voter intimidation.²¹ The co-opted Christian Democrats claimed that their alliance with Voronin had enabled them to push through certain reforms that weakened Communist control, such as legislation giving parties other than the Communists more voice on election commissions, though whether this had any effect on the 2007 elections is disputed, with a discussion beyond the scope of this analysis.

The 2007 local elections had two major implications. First, they gave or confirmed various non-communist parties' hold over local administrative resources, especially those connected with mayoral office. Crucially, this 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

¹⁷ Ryan Kennedy, "Moldova's Local Elections Reflect National Trends," *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 29, 2007.

¹⁸ Igor Botan, executive director of the analytical center ADEPT, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 30, 2009.

¹⁹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 19, 2007.

²⁰ Ryan Kennedy, "Moldova's Local Elections Reflect National Trends," *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 29, 2007; *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 8, 2007.

²¹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 5, 2007; *RFE/RL Newslines*, June 19, 2007.

ability to manipulate results themselves.²² Second, the 2007 elections confirmed for most that the Communists were 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 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.²³

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 and began preparing to contest the April 2009 elections independently of the Communists.²⁴ Asked in late 2008 about the reasons for his resignation, he volunteered that he came to feel that 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, himself 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 experience 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.²⁵ 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 percent not being able to provide a name, and the most mentions

²² March 2009, p.10.

²³ For example, Oleg Serebrian 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 will 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. Oleg Serebrian, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

²⁴ *RFE/RL Newslines*, March 20, 2008.

²⁵ Vasile Tarlev, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

being given to parliamentary chairman Marian Lupu (12 percent) and Tarlev (8 percent).²⁶

Certain big business networks were also reported to be backing opposition candidates as April 2009 approached, as is reflected in the appearance of figures linked to major oligarchs on opposition party lists. Least surprising was Chiril Lucinschi, the businessman son of the former president and Voronin rival who had not succumbed to the Voronin machine. Evidently reflecting a reconciliation between longtime Democratic Party leader and former parliamentary chairman Dumitru Diacov and the family of former president Petru 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 to the Communists and sometimes broadcast reports friendly to the Democrats.²⁷ 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.²⁸ Another ASCOM vice-president, Anatol Salaru, appeared as the number-three man on the list of Mihai 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.²⁹ There were some figures who switched from opposition to backing the 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 in replacement of the Liberal Party's Ghimpu, but these paled in comparison to the scale of defections away from the Communists by Tarlev and the ASCOM Group.³⁰

²⁶ Institute of 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>.

²⁷ For example, TV-7 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.

²⁸ 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.

²⁹ Kseniia Il'ina, "La Famiglia," *Kishinevskii Obozrevatel'*, October 21, 2010.

³⁰ Elena Moldoveanu and Alexandru Eftode, "The Communists and the Kid," *Transitions Online*, 4 December 2008.

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.³¹ 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 2009.³² 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.³³ The Central Election Commission ordered two parties to pull television advertisements that criticized the Communists.³⁴ Prosecutors investigated Urechean and Filat during the final months of the campaign, as described above. Tarlev, the recently-defecting 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.³⁵ State and other procommunist media dragooned Tarlev, citing all kinds of reasons why Voronin had to get rid of him as PM,³⁶ lambasted other opposition figures,³⁷ and generally positively reported on the incumbent authorities,³⁸ including trying to create a sense that it was inevitable that the Communists would win.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ Electronic media that did not fall in line could be themselves accused of bias

³¹ Viorel Cibotaru, director of the European Institute for Political Studies of Moldova, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 23, 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).

³² *Info-Prim Neo*, 26 January 2009, 18:27.

³³ 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.

³⁴ *Infotag*, March 11, 2009.

³⁵ *Moldova Azi*, January 26, 2009; Vasile Tarlev, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

³⁶ E.g., Sergei Ovcharenko, "Za chto Voronin prognal Tarleva?" *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, February 24, 2009.

³⁷ E.g., a report linking Filat to mafia on the NIT channel ("Curier," Russian-language, March 26, 2009, 20:00).

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

³⁹ E.g., reporting on polls in the "Curier" news broadcast, NIT channel, December 18, 2008, 20:00.

⁴⁰ 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 the NIT television channel, January 23, 2009, extended quotations in *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, January 27, 2009.

(as with Lucinschi's TV-7⁴¹), 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 TV-R1).⁴²

The Liberals, Liberal Democrats, and Our Moldova Alliance campaigned hard against the Communists and, making breaking its monopoly on power and achieving European integration the centerpiece of their campaigns, jointly pledged that they would not vote with the latter under any circumstance.⁴³ Filat's Liberal Democrats' central slogan was "vote without fear."⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ Our Moldova Alliance chief Urechean expected a coalition to be the ultimate outcome, however.⁴⁶ All blasted the Communist regime in their ads and interviews. Tarlev, the defecting former prime minister, dogged by state interference in his organization-building plans, ultimately did get on the ballot as Centrist Union party list leader, campaigning for closer relations with Russia, multinational tolerance (himself being ethnic Bulgarian), and policies friendly to manufacturing.⁴⁷ The Christian Democrats circulated negative information on rivals 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.⁴⁸

Overall, as Voronin's constitutionally final term as president wound to a close, we find significant fissures emerging in his power pyramid. Despite his 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 least, more likely to be profitable than it would be to challenge a popular president in a presidentialist system. This is because even if an opposition coalition could not realistically hope to win complete control over Moldova's parliamentarist system, they 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. The result going into the April 5, 2009, parliamentary elections, therefore, was a tough political battle. Voronin's network had significant advantages in popularity and media control despite

⁴¹ "Segodnia v Moldove" program, TV-7 network, March 25, 2009, 20:30.

⁴² *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, December 17, 2008, p.3.

⁴³ *Moldova Azi*, February 3, 2009, 18:32.

⁴⁴ E.g., this appeared in a Romanian-language ad aired just before NIT television network's Russian-language news program "Curier," March 25, 2009, 20:00.

⁴⁵ Infotag, February 5, 2009, in *Moldova Azi*, February 5, 2009.

⁴⁶ Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, December 19, 2008.

⁴⁷ *Kommersant Plus* (Chisinau), December 19, 2008, pp.2-3.

⁴⁸ Author's field notes and, e.g., *Moldova Azi*, 26 March 2009, 18:56.

its second-most-popular figure and the country's richest corporation moving into opposition, but opposition networks still could attract enough resources to mount a significant resistance, aiming at least to deny the Communists the supermajority they needed to fill all three major executive posts. A pre-election 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.⁴⁹

From Succession Crisis to Revolution

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.⁵⁰ As the Central Election Commission (CEC) processed the results overnight 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 cast 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.⁵¹

What happened next is the subject of different interpretations. 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.⁵² 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 well before the voting in anticipation of fraud. Moreover, Chisinau city hall—controlled by Liberal Party mayor Chirtoaca—had actually approved it well in advance, granting permission for post-election protests for the whole period April 6-20 at the request of the

⁴⁹ Viorel Cibotaru, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, March 23, 2009, based on data summarized in Institute for Public Policy, rezumat de presa, "Barametrul Opiniei Publice - martie 2009," Chisinau, Moldova, copy obtained by the author at the public presentation of the results in Chisinau March 24, 2009.

⁵⁰ Institute of Public Policy, "Exit Poll aprilie 2009," IPP website, <http://www.ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=453>, accessed July 3, 2012.

⁵¹ *Unimedia*, April 6, 2009, 13:09, <http://unimedia.md/?mod=news&id=10237>.

⁵² For example, reporting out of Moscow and New York, *The New York Times*, April 7, 2009, p.1.

Liberal Democratic Party's Vlad 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.⁵³ And this was advertised using "old-fashioned" television, specifically outlets controlled by patronal networks willing to challenge the Communists. Thus, as early as March 26, Chiril Lucinschi's TV-7 network had broadcast opposition intentions to protest after the elections,⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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 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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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

⁵³ *Polit.Ru*, April 3, 2009, 11:46.

⁵⁴ TV-7 network, "Segodnia v Moldove" Russian-language news program, March 26, 2009, 20:30.

⁵⁵ *Infotag*, April 6, 2009.

⁵⁶ "Zaiavlenie initsiativnoi gruppy po organizatsii flesh-moba 6 apreliia 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.

⁵⁷ 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."

Union flags were hoisted atop the presidential building.⁵⁸ Voronin and his allies lambasted their political opponents for causing the “bacchanalia,” accusing them of plotting with Romanian⁵⁹ special services to destabilize Moldova.⁶⁰ The government responded by imposing a visa regime on Romania,⁶¹ expelling Romanian journalists and diplomats,⁶² 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.⁶³ 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, 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.⁶⁴ This did not end the protests, however. By some reports, financial records housed in the presidential building happened to be burned in the process.⁶⁵

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 vertical intact despite the challenge, he was able by April 8 to reclaim the seized government buildings. Voronin announced afterwards,

⁵⁸ *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009.

⁵⁹ Or Russian, if one believes the Christian Democrats’ version of the story: *Polit.Ru*, April 8, 2009, 22:51.

⁶⁰ *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009; Tudor Soroceanu, “Troianskii kon’ Traiana Besescu [sic],” *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, April 29, 2009.

⁶¹ *Moldova Azi*, April 29, 2009, 17:20.

⁶² *Infotag*, April 8, 2009.

⁶³ *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).

⁶⁴ 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=yvh8O2y4Fng>, accessed July 3, 2012. See also *RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009.

⁶⁵ *Infotag*, July 21, 2009.

“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!”⁶⁶

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. Lo and behold, the Communists came away with only 60 seats, one short of the magic number 61.⁶⁷ The same day, the Central Election Commission chair reportedly checked into the hospital with a heart problem.⁶⁸ One interpretation is that 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.⁶⁹ Indeed, the experience of 2005, where Voronin had successfully lured a relative abundance of defectors, 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 60.⁷⁰ Some analysts 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.⁷¹ And unsurprisingly, Communist strategist Tkaciuk, when asked to explain the change, cited the CEC explanation as valid.⁷² 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, but were thwarted not by the protesters but by Liberal Party observers in the foreign precincts, who prevented falsification.⁷³ While plausible, none of these explanations would appear particularly

⁶⁶ *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, April 9, 2009.

⁶⁷ *Infotag*, April 9, 2009. This was later confirmed as the final result.

⁶⁸ *Polit.Ru*, April 8, 2009, 17:29.

⁶⁹ *Polit.Ru*, April 10, 2009, 19:05.

⁷⁰ *Infotag*, April 9, 2009.

⁷¹ Independent expert, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 30, 2009.

⁷² Marc Tkaciuk, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁷³ Mihai Ghimpu, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

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.⁷⁴

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 Communist 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). Voronin evidently concluded that his informal power as chief patron would combine effectively with a formal post where he could only be removed by a two-thirds majority in the parliament, making it harder for the next president to remove him even with support from the opposition parties in parliament. The aim of minimizing the chance of a presidential challenge to Voronin was also 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 Marc 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.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶

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, reportedly seeing Lupu as a likely successor to Voronin in the presidency.⁷⁷ In opting for Greceanii for president, Voronin reportedly

⁷⁴ One also wonders whether such a deal could have been discussed in a reported meeting (or a similar meeting) between the three main opposition leaders and the two top state officials, president and prime minister, late in the day on April 7 (*RFE/RL*, April 7, 2009).

⁷⁵ Marc Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁷⁶ Victor Stepaniuc's remarks as reported in *Moldova Azi*, May 20, 2009, 16:55.

⁷⁷ Graham Stack, "The Talented Mr Plahotniuc," *BNE Business new europe*, April 11, 2011.

planned for Lupu, seen within the network as having presidential ambitions, to be prime minister instead.⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹ While both parties also had prominent figures from the ASCOM Group high on their party lists, the son 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.⁸⁰

Urechean, leader of Our Moldova Alliance, similarly explained his party's solidarity in the face of temptation by his care 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.⁸¹ 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.⁸² Communist strategist Tkaciuk asserts that Urechean in fact wanted Voronin to back Urechean for president.⁸³ But the Communists had from the start ruled out any deal that would have given the opposition the presidency.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ 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

⁷⁸ Marc Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁷⁹ *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

⁸⁰ Mihai Ghimpu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁸¹ Serafim Urechean, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁸² *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

⁸³ Marc Tkaciuk, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁸⁴ *Infotag*, May 25, 2009.

⁸⁵ *Moldova Azi*, June 29, 2009, 19:03.

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.⁸⁶

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 posts.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ These themes were summarized in a special film called “Attack on Moldova” that was broadcast on the NIT network.⁹¹ New Deputy Prime Minister Rosca engaged in a crackdown on campaign finance violations.⁹² 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.⁹³ Even the popular Liberal Party mayor of Chisinau, Dorin Chirtoaca, was detained by police at one point.⁹⁴ Some foreign election observers identified with

⁸⁶ Serafim Urechean, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁸⁷ *Infotag*, June 18, 2009.

⁸⁸ *Infotag*, June 18, 2009; Tudor Sorochanu, “Muzhskoi postupok,” *Nezavisimaia Moldova*, June 19, 2009.

⁸⁹ Marc Tkaciuk, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

⁹⁰ For example, *Infotag*, June 16, 2009; Moldova 1 Channel, “Mesager” news program, Russian-language, June 24, 2009, 19:00; NIT (Moldova), “Curier” news program (Russian-language), June 29, 2009, 23:45; and Communist Party television 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 television, “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>.

⁹¹ *Moldova Azi*, June 8, 2009, 19:22.

⁹² *Kishinevskii Obozrevatel’*, June 25, 2009, p.2.

⁹³ *Moldova Azi*, June 11, 2009, 18:19.

⁹⁴ *Infotag*, July 20, 2009.

“colored revolutions” were sent home, citing a lack of proper accreditation.⁹⁵ This time, Voronin boasted, the Communists could get as many as 80 percent of the seats in parliament.⁹⁶

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 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ Lupu also emphasized in this interview and publicly that he and Voronin had developed deep differences in worldview 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.⁹⁹ 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.”¹⁰⁰

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,

⁹⁵ *Polit.Ru*, July 28, 2009, 17:12.

⁹⁶ *Polit.Ru*, June 3, 2009, 17:25.

⁹⁷ *Infotag*, June 10, 2009.

⁹⁸ Marian Lupu, author’s interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009.

⁹⁹ 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.”

¹⁰⁰ Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p.3.

and that this duty was fulfilled with his complete support of the election campaign that had just ended.¹⁰¹

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 landscape.¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³ Explaining his choice for the Democrats, Lupu said that ideally he would have built 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 assume the reins as party leader.¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ Relatively few Communist elites joined in, however.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² 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.

¹⁰³ Dumitru Diacov, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 25, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ 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.

¹⁰⁵ Marian Lupu, author's interview, Chisinau, Moldova, June 29, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ 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.

¹⁰⁷ E.g., *Moldova Azi*, July 1, 2009, 19:01.

¹⁰⁸ *Moldova Azi*, July 10, 2009, 16:28.

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.¹⁰⁹ The three party leaders who 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.¹¹⁰ While Lupu's reinvigorated Democrats also pledged not to vote for a Communist president,¹¹¹ 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.¹¹²

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.¹¹³ 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.¹¹⁴ 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.¹¹⁵ The Communists nevertheless continued to make social promises, including financial assistance for agriculture.¹¹⁶

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,¹¹⁷ 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

¹⁰⁹ *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-language, 19:00 Moldova time; *Moldova Azi*, July 6, 2009, 19:41.

¹¹⁰ *Infotag*, June 15, 2009.

¹¹¹ Marian Lupu, interview in paid-for campaign article in *Moldavskie Vedomosti*, June 26, 2010, p.3.

¹¹² *Infotag*, June 10, 2009; *Infotag*, July 17, 2009.

¹¹³ *Infotag*, July 23, 2009.

¹¹⁴ *Moldova Azi*, July 21, 2009.

¹¹⁵ *Komsomolskaia Pravda v Moldove*, weekly, June 25-July 2, 2009, p.2.

¹¹⁶ *Moldova Azi*, June 30, 2009, 16:48.

¹¹⁷ Institute for Public Politics, "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.

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 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.¹¹⁸ 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 to 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 when required to do so by law, replaced by new parliamentary speaker Ghimpu as acting president pending what the AEI hoped would be Lupu's eventual election.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

Voronin's resignation 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 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 single-pyramid system. 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. This enabled the opposition to dramatically stand down the Communists and, by denying them a single defector, to shake widespread expectations of Voronin's future dominance and ultimately shatter them in the July 29 election as the rapid onset of an 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 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 a deep and careful tracing of

¹¹⁸ 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.

¹¹⁹ Ghimpu held both posts until the next election. What happened next is a long story, with Lupu never actually winning the presidential office and a compromise candidate eventually being chosen. Details are in my book manuscript, with the relevant section currently available upon request.

political processes inside the regime as well as outside of it 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.

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