

IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, RUSSIA STILL FEELS AT “HOME”.

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In Moldova, television remains one of the most important sources of information. Although citizens' trust in television is declining, especially in Russian television channels or Russian-language channels retransmitted in Moldova, TV news still informs (and shapes) over half of the country's population. Despite predictions of the internet overthrowing television, it has never fallen below the national threshold of [50% in daily access](#), reaching its highest score between 2008 and 2015, at [around 87%](#), and currently standing at [56.5%](#).

Although it is no longer the most important source of information, television and radio still dominate over other sources of information when it comes to providing information about the country and abroad, being [preferred by 48.7% of people](#), while 42.2% access informational websites and 42.6% use social media.

Russian or Russian-language television and radio are the primary source of information [for 16.1%](#) of the population of Moldova, decreasing with [3% from 2022](#). Romanian or European television and radio, and Romanian-language television and radio, are watched by [20.8%](#), up approximately [4% from 2022](#) (excluding those defined as "Moldovan" or local).

THE STATE OF EMERGENCY AND ITS IMPACT ON THE AUDIOVISUAL LANDSCAPE OF MOLDOVA

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the government measures adopted to regulate the domestic media landscape have generated a notable change in the population's preferences for sources of information. Thus, almost two years after the third to last measurement of the perception of the population of the Republic of Moldova towards the media ([BOP February 2021](#)), we observe a significant decrease in the attitude of consumers towards the media from Russia or in the Russian language. Respectively, in 2021, [42.9%](#) of people expressed their trust in Russian or Russian-language sources of information. In 2023, only [27.5% of respondents](#) surveyed still considered that these sources are reliable. On the other hand, the level of trust in sources of information from [Ukraine \(26.5%\), Romania \(40.1%\) and the EU \(41.3%\)](#) remains relatively constant with slight positive fluctuations in the case of Romania and the EU and negative in the case of Ukraine.

<i>Evolution of trust in media from:</i>	<i>Feb. 2021</i>	<i>Nov. 2022</i>	<i>Aug. 2023</i>
<i>Romania</i>	33.5%	38.4%	40.1%
<i>EU</i>	39.7%	39.4%	41.3%
<i>Ukraine</i>	19.9%	28.9%	26.5%
<i>Russia</i>	42.9%	27.3%	27.5%

Table 1. Comparison of the evolution of public trust in the media according to BOP 2021, BOP 2022 and BOP 2023.

It is also noteworthy that the TV stations whose licenses were [suspended in December 2022^{\[1\]}](#) fell out of the top of preferred sources of information as early as November 2022. However, the Prime channel is the one who lost its notoriety the most (whose license was not suspended). In 2021 it was rated as the first among the three favorite TV channels by [44%](#) of respondents^[2]. Yet, in November 2022 it gained just 25.6% and in 2023 even a lower score of 20.9% from the total of respondents.

This TV channel is followed by the RTR Moldova, which fell from 22.6% in February 2021 to 9.9% in November 2022, and the NTV channel, which lost its notoriety from

20.5% to 14.4%. The graph below shows how the respondents' preferences for 8 TV channels have oscillated [from 2021](#) to [2022](#), according to data from the opinion polls conducted by the [Institute of Public Policies](#).

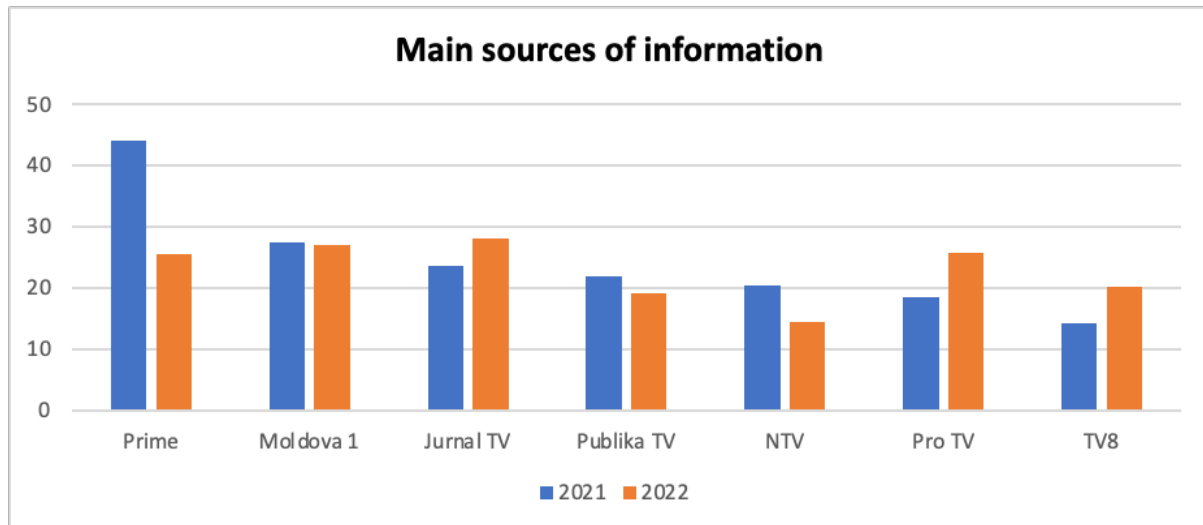


Figure 1. TV channels that were evaluated as the most important as a result of the frequency of use of respondents according to BOP 2021 and BOP 2022.

It is worth noting that if channels such as Prime or Moldova 1 are relatively equivalent to the distribution of population preferences depending on ethnicity or spoken language, Primul în Moldova, NTV, and RTR are among the favorites of citizens who identify with other ethnic categories or Russian speakers. On the other hand, the channels Jurnal TV, Pro TV, and TV8 are much more frequently mentioned as the main sources of information for citizens who identify as Romanian speakers.

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE IN THE PUBLIC OPINION PERCEPTION AT 560 DAYS OF WAR

Polls in the Republic of Moldova suggest that although trust in Vladimir Putin is gradually declining among citizens of the Republic of Moldova, reaching [33.1%](#) at present from [45.5% before the war](#), Russian propaganda and the messages of the Kremlin's influence agents still resonate with a large part of the population.

Taking as an example the [most frequent falsehoods](#) launched by and for Russia in 2022 in the Republic of Moldova, such as those [about the war](#), followed by those about the [energy crisis](#) and those targeting the discrediting of local governments, we find that they are positively appreciated by at least one third of the country's population.

Therefore, the falsehood that presents the Russian invasion as a necessity to defend the Russian-speaking people in the Donbas region who would be discriminated against is frequently encountered in the domestic public opinion. According to [surveys](#) initiated by the WatchDog.MD Community, [19.4% of respondents](#) believe that in recent years in Donbas there has been a "genocide of the Russian-speaking population by Ukrainian nationalists", and [40.4% of all respondents](#) interviewed approve the statement that "the Russian population in Ukraine has been subjected to discrimination and genocide".

The false narrative that Ukraine is actually the site of a "denazification" and "demilitarization" operation is currently [resonating with 17.0%](#). The statement is predominantly supported by Russian-speaking respondents. Regarding the leadership of Ukraine, [30.4%](#) believed at the beginning of the year that President V. Zelensky and his "regime" is fascist.

In addition, [22.5%](#) of respondents considered in January 2023 that Russia was defending the people's republics of Donbas from Ukrainian attacks, a percentage that slightly increased in the February-March 2023 survey, [reaching 26%](#). Of the 22.5% of respondents, about a third were Russian speakers with general or incomplete secondary education. This false narrative decreased in August 2023, resonating with [18.1% of respondents](#).

Another set of narratives that deeply distorts the role of international actors in the Russian war in Ukraine and portrays Russia as a victim under attack who was forced to retaliate is that of blaming the Western states for triggering this war. Russian leaders insist that in fact the war in Ukraine is against the Western states who intentionally triggered this conflict, and that Russia would be fighting not with Ukraine but with NATO and the Western countries, being forced to defend itself from their aggression.

This type of message is often promoted nationally by both Russian-language media and certain [politicians who favor Russia](#), members of the national parties, and are distributed on their social media channels.

In the Republic of Moldova, 51.6% of the respondents to the [February-March 2023 survey](#) believe the statement that Russia is actually fighting NATO in Ukraine. In June 2023, this score decreased slightly but remains at [45.8%](#). Almost as many people believe that Russia was threatened by the fact that Ukraine wanted to become a member of NATO and have NATO military bases near Russia - 51.6%. The respondents who share these opinions are equally Romanian and Russian speakers, with various levels of education, both urban and rural.

Also, from the surveys conducted by the Watchdog.MD Community, we can observe that, in addition to V. Putin, both the Russian Federation and the United States are considered to be two actors who are to blame for provoking the war (second and third place among respondents). Respectively, [17.7%](#) of those surveyed claim this about the United States and [17%](#) about Russia (January 2023). These figures slightly

increase in the February-March 2023 survey, where [19.5%](#) identify Russia as guilty of the war and [19.2%](#) the United States. The number of people who hold this opinion is inversely proportional to the language spoken. Russian speakers predominate in the number of those who blame the United States for the start of the war, while Romanian speakers believe that Russia and V. Putin personally ([25.15%](#)) are responsible for the war. The situation remains relatively the same according to data from June 2023.

FROM TV TO SOCIAL MEDIA IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH

Despite efforts to regulate the national audiovisual space, we note that the influence of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Moldova persists. However, what is much more dangerous is that, on the one hand, government measures to regulate the audiovisual space without an adequate public campaign can be perceived by the Russian-speaking population as a deprivation of the right to choose and to be informed, and on the other hand, that the groups most exposed to Russian propaganda remain marginalized and tend to radicalize in social media^[3].

The suspension of the licenses of the three TV stations that broadcast content in Russian has led to a shrinking of audiovisual options available to citizens. Although there is a noticeable increase in the ratings of TV stations that present information in a more or less balanced manner and negatively present Russia's actions in Ukraine, such as TV8, Jurnal TV and Pro TV, these stations fail to co-opt groups that are the most vulnerable to Russian propaganda.

Analysis of public opinion polls in the Republic of Moldova shows that the target audience of the most popular channels differs. For example, Jurnal TV and Pro TV are preferred by Romanian speakers, and the RTR and NTV channels by Russian-speaking viewers. This reality suggests that, although the media impact of the TV8, Jurnal TV and Pro TV channels is currently growing, these TV channels do not primarily include and do not address Russian-speaking citizens. As a result, this is reflected in the [persistence of the discrepancy in the population's perception](#) of subjects and geopolitical vectors depending on the language used, but also in the [growing trust in the internet](#) at the expense of television. The biggest challenge remains what integral information alternatives the audiovisual space in the Republic of Moldova offers to viewers who consume media in Russian and how it supports them to change their behavior perpetuated over time.

[1] Provision no. 54 of December 16, 2022 issued by the Emergency Situations Commission of the Republic of Moldova. It is about the TV channels Primul în Moldova, RTR Moldova, Accent TV, NTV Moldova, TV6, Orhei TV.

[2] Until the end of 2019, Prime channel, owned by V. Plahotniuc, broadcasted in Moldova Channel One (Perviy Kanal). By the end of 2019, [the Audiovisual Council of the Republic of Moldova approved the transfer of the broadcasting license of Channel One to Accent TV](#). Thus, Channel One in Moldova was renamed Primul în Moldova.

[3] For more information and recommendations, you can consult the report "[The Image of International Actors in Moldova TV News](#)". WatchDog. Md, Chişinău, August 17, 2023 and also [BOP 2023](#).