

## 1. ROMANIA's ELECTIONS OVERVIEW – 22 APRIL 2025

Welcome to the 3rd iteration of our bulletin! We aim to provide special insights into how disinformation works and spreads in Romania in the weeks leading up to the presidential elections. At [Funky Citizens](#), we have been monitoring trends and narratives linked to disinformation for the last few years, and we understand how intense this crucial period is. Along with our weekly briefing on election news developments, we offer in-depth analysis on the evolution of social media disinformation campaigns targeting the Romanian presidential race.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Romania reaches the halfway point of its presidential election campaign confronting major challenges in understanding and controlling platform disinformation, particularly regarding coordinated campaigns and state measures to protect the informational space. Nicușor Dan suspended his online campaign after fake accounts flooded his social media, while Crin Antonescu faced controversy over Securitate files and inflammatory statements. The Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) ordered the removal of 629 posts for lacking proper electoral labeling according to new regulations, raising freedom of expression concerns. Dominant disinformation narratives portray Călin Georgescu as a persecuted savior, alongside antisemitic conspiracies and claims of election manipulation by EU and domestic institutions.

### WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Crin Antonescu's name surfaced in a Securitate surveillance file targeting a teacher identified as C.Ș. from Niculițel. The National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives [determined that Antonescu's statement](#) to the Securitate in January 1988 falls under provisions that do not classify him as a collaborator, as the information was given during an investigation for political reasons. Antonescu later [publicly read his statement](#), emphasizing it contained "only things already known" to officers investigating his friend Ștefan Costache, who had attempted to flee Romania before 1989. During an Antena 3 interview, Crin Antonescu [made controversial remarks about drug trafficking](#), stating traffickers should face "maximum severity" and then made the shocking statement: "If I could—I know it's not possible—I would do as they do in China, I would have them shot in stadiums." He later clarified he doesn't support reintroducing the death penalty.

Meanwhile, Nicușor Dan, independent presidential candidate, [publicly denounced](#) what he described as a coordinated attack against his social media accounts. During a press conference, he revealed that his accounts were "invaded by hundreds of thousands of fake accounts" from countries like Vietnam, India, and Pakistan, forcing him to suspend his online campaign, for which he was spending approximately €15,000 daily. Nicușor Dan has filed formal complaints with multiple Romanian authorities including the Central Electoral Bureau (BEC), Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP), and various European institutions, questioning the state's ability to prevent a repeat of the circumstances that led to the annulment of the 2024 elections. In legal developments, Elena Lasconi [won her case against USR](#) at the Bucharest Court of



Appeal, which rejected the party's request to overturn the BEC decision prohibiting them from campaigning for Nicușor Dan after withdrawing support from Lasconi.

Independent presidential candidate Victor Ponta recently made [controversial claims](#) about receiving Serbian citizenship as recognition for allegedly saving Belgrade from flooding in 2014, at the expense of Romanian localities. According to Ponta, he personally ordered the opening of Iron Gates dam's gates against Romanian authorities' wishes, which led to flooding in Romanian villages while sparing Belgrade. These statements by candidate Ponta have sparked the appearance of several narratives stating that [he prioritized](#) Belgrade over Romanian villages, moreover affecting Romanian sovereignty, particularly notable given Ponta's positioning as a sovereignist candidate.

[Investigative reports by G4Media and Info Sud-Est](#) have uncovered a network of anonymous Facebook pages spending over €60,000 in the first week of the campaign on unmarked political ads. These pages primarily targeted Nicușor Dan with manipulated or AI-generated content, while also attacking George Simion (AUR) and Crin Antonescu (PSD-PNL-UDMR coalition candidate). Some pages promoted Victor Ponta and Elena Lasconi as "victims of the system."

The Central Electoral Bureau (BEC) has taken steps to address online campaign violations by establishing an inter-institutional team to review complaints. As of April 14, BEC has issued orders to [remove 629 posts from various platforms](#), primarily for lack of proper labeling of the political content. Their approach has raised significant concerns about freedom of expression limitations among civil society organizations, particularly regarding the broad interpretation of who qualifies as a "political actor" under Emergency Ordinance No. 1/2025.

The regulatory framework regarding electoral online content has become the main subject of attention in the public discussion. On January 16, the government issued [Emergency Ordinance No. 1/2025](#), introducing substantial changes to political advertising regulations without any prior consultation with relevant stakeholders. This ordinance requires all electoral materials to be properly labeled according to electoral rules, regardless of whether they are distributed by candidates or their supporters, including ordinary citizens. Of the 609 posts flagged by BEC for removal, 149 were published by private individuals, with BEC justifying these removals by citing EU Regulations 900/2024 and 2065/2022, as well as [Law 50/2024](#).

Several mid-April polls reflect the voters' preferences after USR's withdrawal of support from Elena Lasconi in favor of Nicușor Dan. [The most recent Sociopol poll](#) (April 14-17) shows George Simion maintaining a lead with 35%, while Nicușor Dan holds 14%, Victor Ponta 22%, and Crin Antonescu 17%. Elena Lasconi's support is at 11% in this survey. [IRSOP](#) shows George Simion leading (31%), followed by Dan (28%), Ponta (18%), and Antonescu (17%), with Lasconi at 4%. Other polls demonstrate varying standings: [AtlasIntel](#) places Simion first (34.4%) with Antonescu second (25.5%), while [DataEcho](#) shows Dan leading (29.5%). Lasconi's numbers range between 4-10% across surveys. The fluctuating numbers illustrate both the

aftermath of USR's decision to withdraw support for Lasconi and the volatility of voter preferences with three weeks remaining before the election.

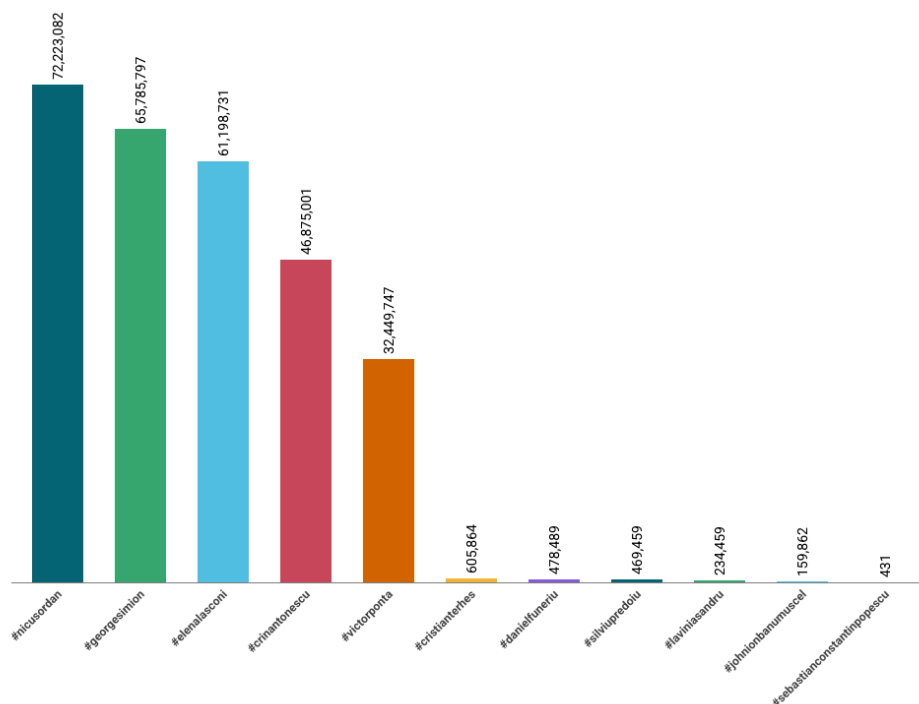


Fig. 1 Total growth in hashtag views between April 7-21 on TikTok

## SOCIAL MEDIA DISINFORMATION

Most of the disinformation narratives reported were once again centered on Romanian politics, with Călin Georgescu (C.G.) appearing as a key figure. Many of the most frequently recurring narratives focus on his alleged persecution by a “parallel state,” support from international powers like Russia or the U.S. At the same time, narratives were disseminated through coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) networks, touching on a wide array of themes. There were also **frequent assertions about election interference**, with narratives targeting the EU, France, and domestic institutions as actors attempting to rig or cancel elections. Some discourses promoted **Georgescu as either the rightful or inevitable president**, while others accuse mainstream parties or political rivals like Nicușor Dan and Crin Antonescu of complicity in a broader anti-nationalist scheme.

In addition to the central Georgescu-related themes, a range of other narratives emerged, many of which rely on familiar populist, antisemitic, and anti-globalist tropes. These include claims that Romania is being subjugated by the EU, used to finance U.S. wars, or dragged into foreign

conflicts. More fringe ideas—such as **Elon Musk running for president, AI-generated political deepfakes, and apocalyptic predictions**—were also present. There was also a notable use of religious and nationalist rhetoric, with **narratives portraying Putin as a defender of Christian values and accusing the Orthodox Church of financing Georgescu.**

During the April 16-18 period, we identified and reported 180 posts from Meta and TikTok containing election disinformation through the Rapid Response System:

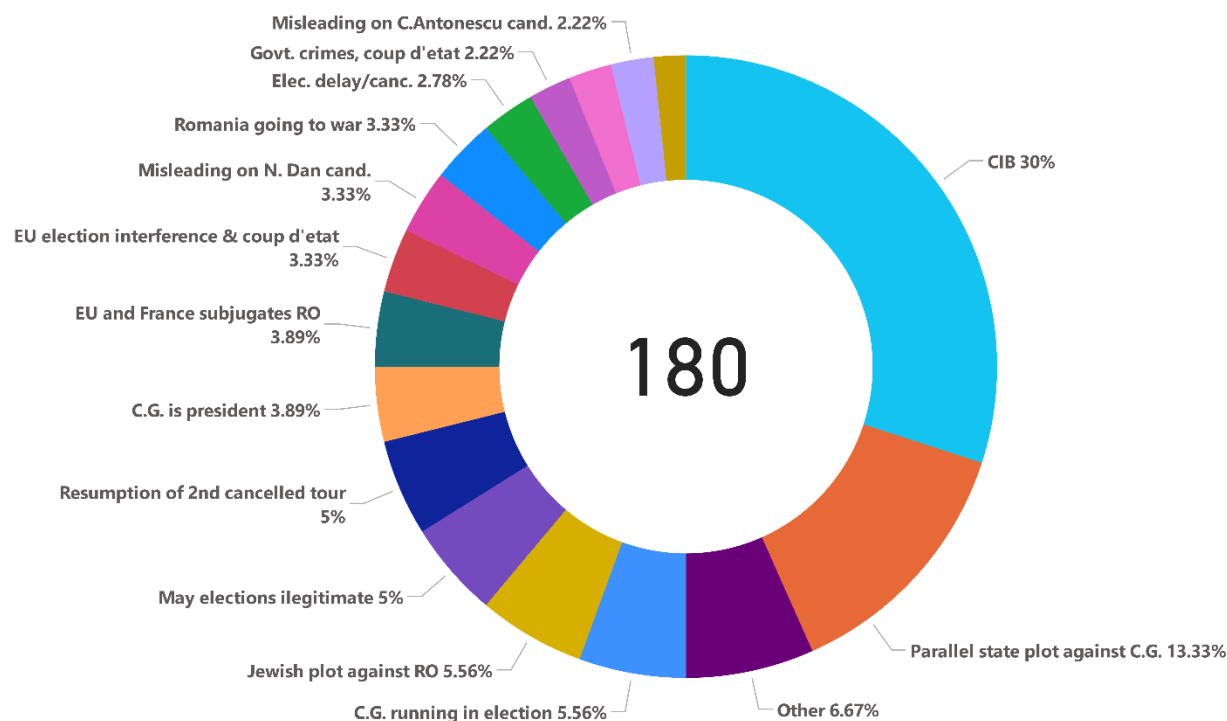


Fig. 2 Total reported urls by narrative.

Antisemitic narratives suggested that Jewish individuals or groups are orchestrating a plot against Romania (RO). The posts often use coded language or historic tropes, as well as symbols like George Soros in order to spread hate and justify xenophobia, targeting both internal political figures and external influences perceived to be aligned with Jewish interests.

Claims and speculation that Călin Georgescu is preparing to run or already running in upcoming elections were also prevalent within this reporting timeframe. These narratives often portray him as a political savior or anti-system candidate, facing opposition from corrupt elites or foreign interests, and tend to rally support by invoking nationalism and anti-globalist sentiment and that

legally binding injunctions had been issued by Romanian and International authorities legitimizing Georgescu's candidacy in the upcoming elections.

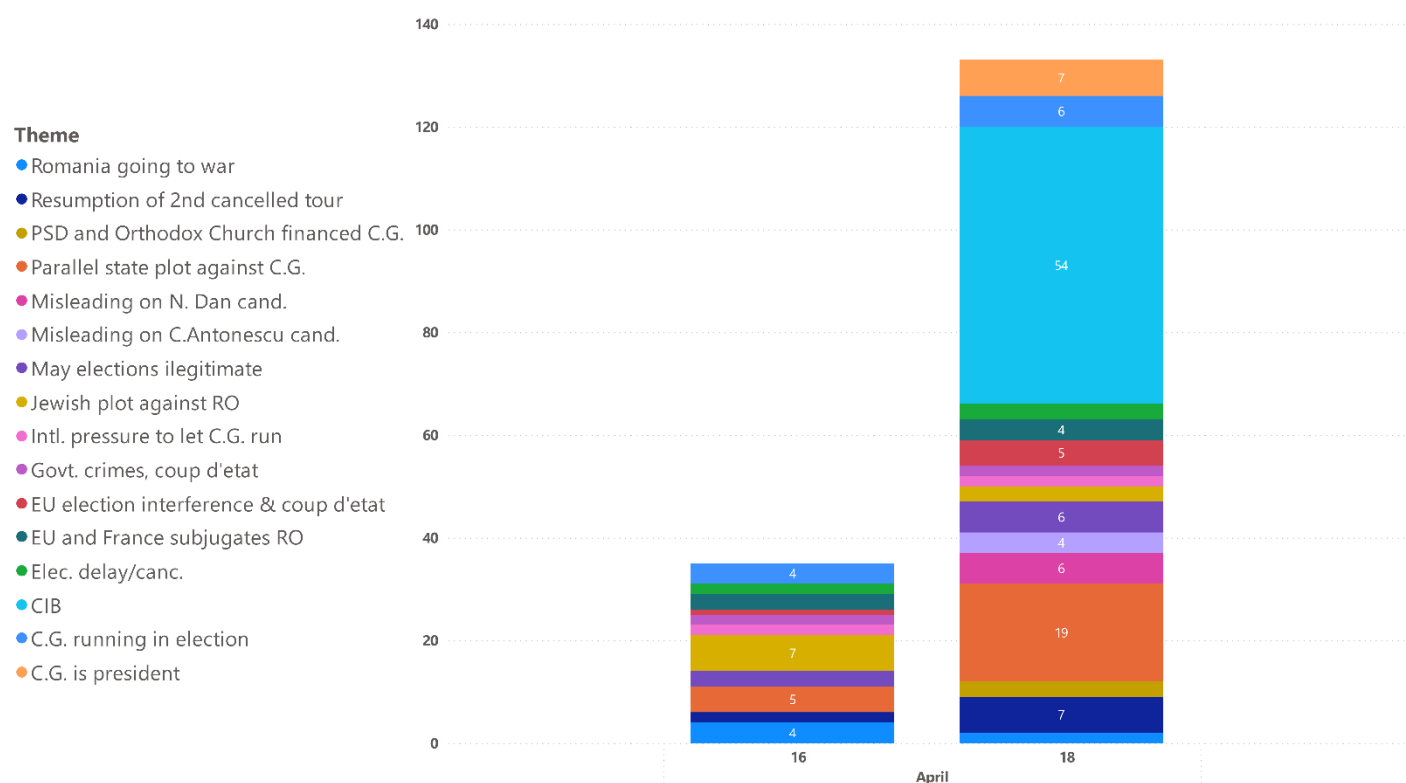


Fig. 3 Narratives by theme and reporting day.

Narratives were also using disinformation to raise questions about the legitimacy of the upcoming May elections, suggesting that the electoral process is rigged, manipulated, or unfair. It included allegations of media bias, vote tampering, collusion among political elites as well as foreign (US) enquiries and alleged Russian reports portraying the elections in Romania as illegitimate and manipulated by the state.

Discourses referencing the resumption of the 2<sup>nd</sup> cancelled presidential electoral round were also prevalent. These narratives suggest external approval or pressure, particularly from the U.S., which supposedly supports resuming the elections at that point. These discourses were also accompanied by claims and declarations that Călin Georgescu is the rightful or de facto president of Romania.

**Romania was also framed as a victim of European or Western control, particularly at the hands of the EU and France.** Narratives promoted the idea that Romania's sovereignty is being undermined through political or economic domination. Similar discourses promoted the

idea that the European Union is meddling in Romania's elections or political processes, staging a coup d'état.

At the same time, narratives that Romania is either preparing for or **being dragged into a war** were reported within this period as well. These messages were alarmist, implying that citizens will be conscripted or that the nation is being pulled into conflicts beyond its control, often due to alliances with Western powers. The tone is often fear-driven and appeals to anti-war or anti-EU sentiment while "NATO" was less present as a threat within this reporting period.

Disinformation on statements and actions related to Nicușor Dan's candidacy were also reported. These framed Dan as opposing Călin Georgescu or being part of a broader anti-Georgescu political bloc, discourse which is linked to the presumed plot against the politician. Similar to the Nicușor Dan theme, other narratives used deceptive and manipulated content around the candidacy of Crin Antonescu. Posts claimed judicial interventions or last-minute political decisions affecting his electoral status.

Discourses portraying the Romanian government as being behind criminal actions, including staging a coup d'état were also present within this reporting timeframe. These stories suggested that democratic norms are being violated to consolidate power or suppress opposition. Disinformation narratives also portrayed elections in Romania as being delayed or that they would be outright canceled, often presented as part of a larger scheme to prevent certain candidates—particularly anti-establishment figures—from gaining traction.

At the same time, actors such as Russia or the U.S. were portrayed as pushing for Călin Georgescu's inclusion in the electoral process following claims of illegitimacy of the previous electoral process. It portrays external support as a counterbalance to domestic efforts to block his candidacy, framing it as part of a geopolitical tug-of-war between occult and sovereignist forces.

### ***EXPERT OPINION***

Romania is going through a second presidential election campaign within half a year. Just like the first electoral campaign in November, the information space is distorted by disinformation narratives that repeat ideas favorable to the Russian Federation. What we can observe is that the state has been unable, during these months, to react credibly and consistently to achieve objectives related to societal resilience in the face of disinformation. The measures adopted to counter disinformation are rather regulations designed for specific cases, but do not reflect a coherent public policy or even a real concern for ensuring an equidistant information space.

Also noteworthy is the action of independent candidate Nicușor Dan, who denounced a campaign manifested through coordinated inauthentic behavior, meant to artificially amplify his presence on social networks. Last year, this type of behavior observed around the official accounts of candidate Călin Georgescu ultimately led to the annulment of elections due to



suspicious of foreign interference. This is a singular case - a candidate denouncing the artificial amplification of his online image, and social networks should respond seriously and reveal the source of the interference denounced by Dan.

Codruța Simina, co-founder of Misreport.ro and journalist specialised in investigations regarding online disinformation

### **FACT-CHECKING CORNER**

[The main topics](#) included **European Union trade and political decisions, misinformation about Ukrainian refugees and citizenship laws, COVID-19 vaccine conspiracies, and geopolitical narratives involving the United States and Germany.** Several false claims circulated widely, including assertions that the EU had rejected a zero-tariff agreement with the U.S. Other fabricated stories suggested Ukrainian refugees could gain Romanian citizenship through simplified procedures.

COVID-19 conspiracy theories continued to spread, with baseless claims that some vaccines were merely placebos or had caused more deaths than the virus itself. Additional falsehoods included stories about Germany planning a special tax on polluting phones and allegations that the U.S. was pressuring Romania to allow Călin Georgescu to run for president. Another fabricated narrative claimed that a U.S. delegation visiting Bucharest consisted primarily of anti-Trump politicians.

*This newsletter is part of our ongoing work with the [Bulgarian-Romanian Observatory of Digital Media](#), member of [EDMO](#).*

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