1. ROMANIA AFTER ELECTIONS - 21 MAY 2025

Welcome to the 11th 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

Following Romania's presidential election that saw Nicușor Dan win with 53.60% of the vote, the information landscape has been transformed by a wave of coordinated disinformation aimed at delegitimizing the results. False narratives of electoral rigging dominate social media, featuring AI-generated videos alleging vote manipulation and foreign interference—particularly involving Moldova. Other prominent themes include illegal voting booth footage, conspiracy theories about a "parallel state," and increasing geopolitical fearmongering suggesting Romania is heading to war or facing state collapse.

WEEKLY OVERVIEW

Nicușor Dan is Romania's new president, winning with 53.60% (6,168,642 votes) compared to George Simion's 46.40% (5,339,053 votes). The electoral map shows significant shifts between rounds—while Simion won 36 of 47 regions in the first round, the second round saw Dan capture 24 regions to Simion's 23, winning in major urban centers like Bucharest (all six sectors), Cluj, Timișoara, and coastal Constanța. Although Simion dominated the diaspora with 55.86% (912,553 votes) compared to Dan's 44.14% (720,996 votes), winning in countries with large Romanian communities like Italy, Germany, France, Spain and the UK, Dan won in the USA, Canada, Russia, China, Ukraine, and notably in Moldova where voter turnout significantly exceeded first-round levels. Youth turnout was especially impressive, with 69.6% of young voters participating—over 2.5 million voters aged 18-34 cast ballots, representing 560,609 more young voters than in the first round.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights released its preliminary report Monday, noting that Romania's presidential runoff was conducted "professionally" and "efficiently" despite "limited transparency." While fundamental freedoms were respected, observers highlighted concerns about widespread disinformation, polarizing rhetoric, and the regulatory gap between election rounds. The report criticized "fragmented and generally insufficient" institutional responses to "inauthentic behavior" around both campaigns, which affected voters' ability to make informed choices.

Disappointed supporters of George Simion have begun cutting up their identity documents and sharing images on social media in protest of the election results. This mirrors similar incidents following the annulled November 2024 elections. Simion has urged his followers not to destroy their passports, saying: "We don't need to cut our passports; we need to fight for the Romania in our hearts... This is just one battle; we haven't lost the war."

The joint session of Parliament will convene on Monday, May 26, at 12:00 PM, for Nicușor Dan's swearing-in ceremony. Following the publication of final results by the Permanent Electoral Authority, the Constitutional Court will validate the outcome on Thursday, setting the stage for Monday's inauguration. Given that Romania currently has an interim government, Dan will then need to call parliamentary parties for consultations and nominate a new Prime Minister.

The National Political Council of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) will meet Tuesday to formally acknowledge Marcel Ciolacu's resignation, appoint an interim president, and establish a negotiating team for potential coalition talks. Some party leaders have indicated that while PSD might ultimately decide not to join the government, they should nevertheless participate in negotiations. For the first time in 35 years, the PSD headquarters remained dark during the presidential runoff, as social democrats refused to take an official position in these elections. Despite encouraging voters to choose pro-European candidates after the first round of last year's elections, PSD was completely silent.

Călin Georgescu issued his first post-election message Monday: "The victory of light will never be decided by elections, but will be generated from burning hearts that do not give up." He congratulated Simion and extended prayers for Nicușor Dan "to be a wise president for Romania," while portraying the country as "not lost, just wounded" and concluding with: "Christ has risen!"

The National Audiovisual Council held an emergency meeting Monday and ordered the removal of a TikTok clip falsely suggesting that Romania's presidential elections had been annulled. The video combined recent images of the candidates with audio from the December announcement canceling the previous elections, accumulating 151,000 views before the CNA unanimously ordered its removal for "massively broadcast" disinformation.

Thousands of Nicușor Dan supporters gathered in central Bucharest to celebrate his victory, blocking Elisabeta Boulevard while chanting "Dan is president" and "Europe." Many carried Romanian and European Union flags as Dan appeared on the balcony of Hotel Cișmigiu, his campaign headquarters, to greet the assembled crowd.

The Kremlin characterized Romania's presidential elections as "at least strange," with Putin's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov referencing Călin Georgescu's exclusion from the race. When asked about Telegram founder Pavel Durov's claim that French intelligence pressured him to suppress voices supporting Simion, Peskov stated it was "not news" that European states interfere in other countries' affairs, while Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova called it "direct interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state."

SOCIAL MEDIA DISINFORMATION

There was a multifaceted disinformation ecosystem surrounding Romania's electoral process, marked by a blend of conspiracy, manipulation, externalization of blame and social

polarization. Central among them is the claim of Electoral rigging, which casts doubt on the legitimacy of the election by alleging systemic fraud regarding Nicușor Dan's campaign. This includes AI-generated videos suggesting that votes were tampered with, and accusations implicating Moldovan President Maia Sandu in facilitating illegal cross-border voting. These narratives lack concrete evidence but resonate with existing distrust toward political elites and neighboring states. Similarly, Voting booth footage violates voting confidentiality to reinforce these claims, either to showcase supposed patriotic fervor or to imply coercion and procedural failure.

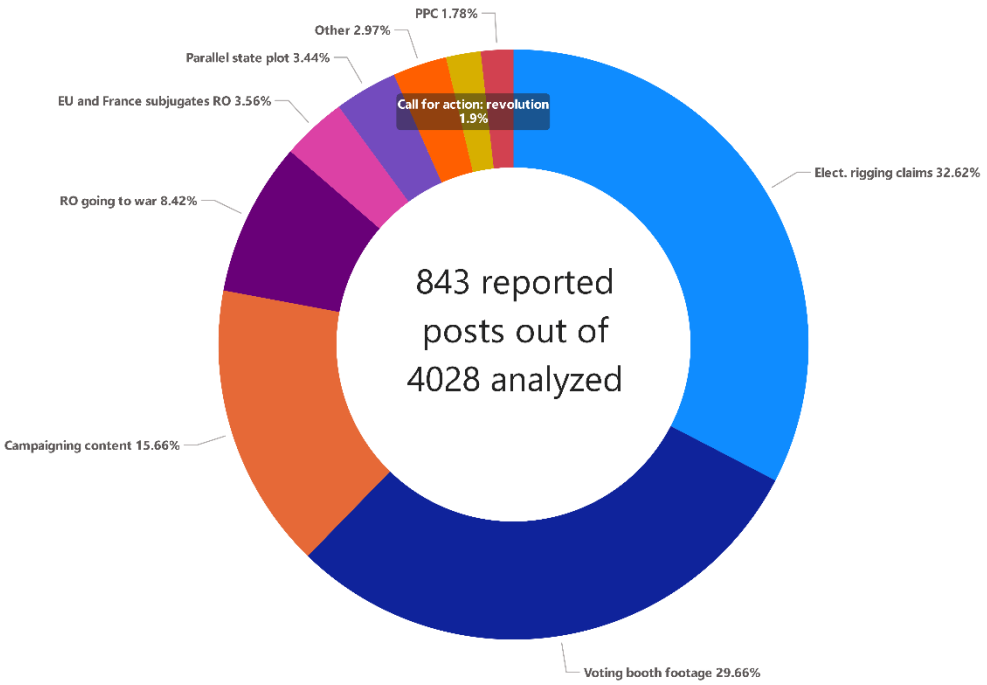

Fig.1 Main themes

Meanwhile, illegal promotional materials and smear narratives were dissminated during the official silence period, often using AI to amplify emotionally charged nationalist or defamatory rhetoric. The fear of foreign subjugation fuelled narratives like EU and France subjugates RO, portraying Romania as a victim of Western imperial ambitions aided by domestic "progressives." On a more conspiratorial axis, a parallel state plot was referenced casting doubt on the legitimacy of the elections, together with a call for revolution after the voting concluded. Narratives suggested the existence of a shadow government manipulating democratic institutions and urging citizens to rise up against perceived tyranny. Premature polling claims were aimed to errode the credibility of media and polling institutions. At the

same time, allegations of Romania going to war or already being involved in conflict escalated the narrative into a subjective existential geopolitical threat.

The main themes

“Elect. Rigging claims” (Electoral rigging claims) describes a surge of posts have surfaced accusing authorities of manipulating the electoral process. These include AI-generated videos purporting to show fraudulent vote counting and allegations that Moldovan president Maia Sandu was involved in voter fraud and that Moldovan citizens were bused in to vote illegally in Romania. The content feeds into longstanding fears of external interference and systemic corruption, without verifiable evidence. At the same time, this code referenced other states’ alleged stance of not recognizing Romania’s election due to massive voting fraud.

“Voting booth footage” were social media posts showing video footage from inside voting booths, revealing voters’ choices in real time. These clips, which appear to breach electoral privacy laws, have been used to support various narratives—ranging from proof of “patriotic voting” to accusations of pressure or manipulation.

“Campaigning content” refered to illegally disseminated campaign materials, including slick, AI-generated videos promoting figures like Călin Georgescu or content smearing candidate Nicușor Dan. These pieces blended emotional appeals with nationalist rhetoric, targeting disillusioned voters.

“RO going to war” (Romania going to war) captures content referencing an imminent, if not already ongoing war with the Russian Federation. It includes threats and apocalyptic warnings, alongside allegations of troop movements, military operations or drafting taking place in Romania.

“EU and France subjugates RO” allege that Western powers—particularly the European Union and France—are engaged in a coordinated effort to subjugate Romania. These narratives accuse “progressive” elites of enabling foreign dominance and selling out national interests., framed as resistance against cultural colonization.

“Parallel state plot” revolves around the belief in a “deep state”—an invisible network of elites operating behind the scenes to manipulate political outcomes. Posts allege that supporters of politicians like Nicușor Dan are part of a covert scheme to consolidate power through hidden influence. The storyline aligns with populist and conspiratorial rhetoric, aiming to delegitimize formal political institutions by suggesting they are mere façades for a deeper, unaccountable structure.

“Call for action: revolution” go beyond critique and call openly for political insurrection. In one case, a Romanian party was accused of mobilizing supporters via direct messages, urging them to take to the streets and oppose the ruling establishment. These calls for mass action

are framed as necessary responses to alleged electoral fraud and crimes committed by the Romanian government against its own citizens.

“PPC” or “Premature polling claims” describe narrative which challenge the credibility of polling data and media coverage. Users claim that exit polls are rigged and that new or outsider parties are being deliberately excluded from public discourse. The posts insinuate a coordinated effort to manipulate perception and obscure real electoral outcomes, fostering distrust in the media and mainstream political apparatus.

The minor themes

“Elec. delay/canc” or “Elections delayed or cancelled” refers to rumors suggesting that the electoral process will be delayed or outright canceled due to mass protests or to state intervention in case the “right candidate” is not chosen by the electorate. One widely shared post alleges that authorities—specifically targeting interim president Ilie Bolojan—will cancel the elections.

“State collapse” captures dystopian claims that Romania is on the brink of total societal collapse. Posts assert that the country has already “died,” citing failing banks, broken institutions, and the erosion of democratic norms. The tone is fatalistic, portraying Romania as a failed state incapable of recovery.

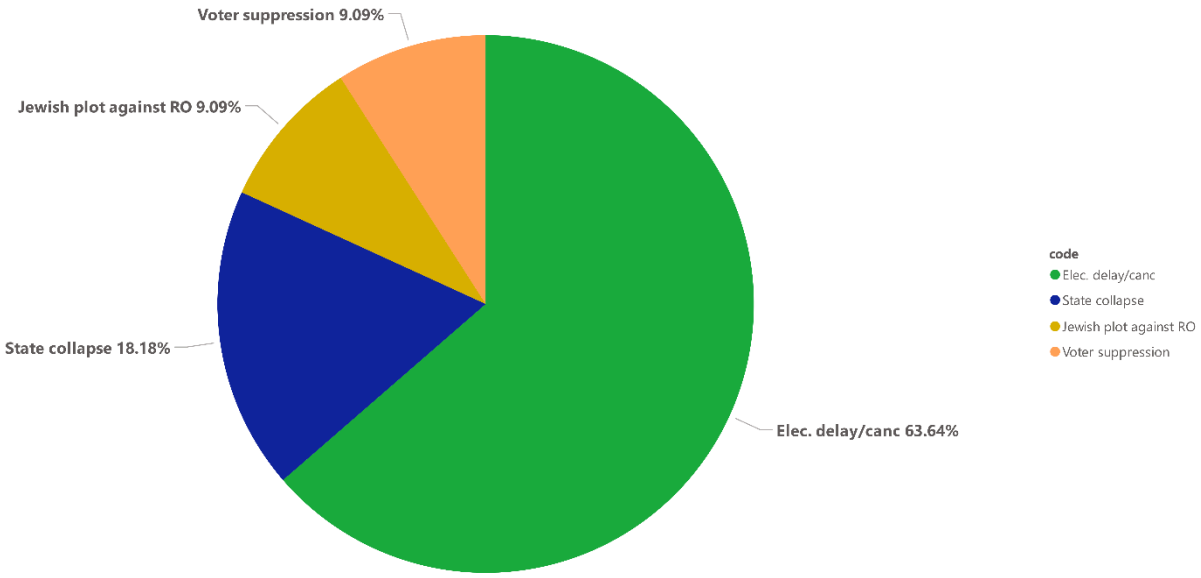

Fig.2 Minor themes

“Resumption of 2nd round”references last year’s electoral controversy. Some posts falsely claim that a second round of elections has been authorized and that Russian and US pressure Romanian authorities towards this outcome.

“Jewish plot against RO” draws on antisemitic sentiment, falsely alleging that Romania is being targeted by a Jewish-led conspiracy. One example claims that politician Nicușor Dan is backed by billionaire George Soros, portraying him as a puppet in a broader Jewish plot to destabilize the country.

Although limited in scope, “Voter suppression” warns people not to vote too early, and that they would be able to vote in June invoking special rules. This narrative targetted George Simion’s voters.

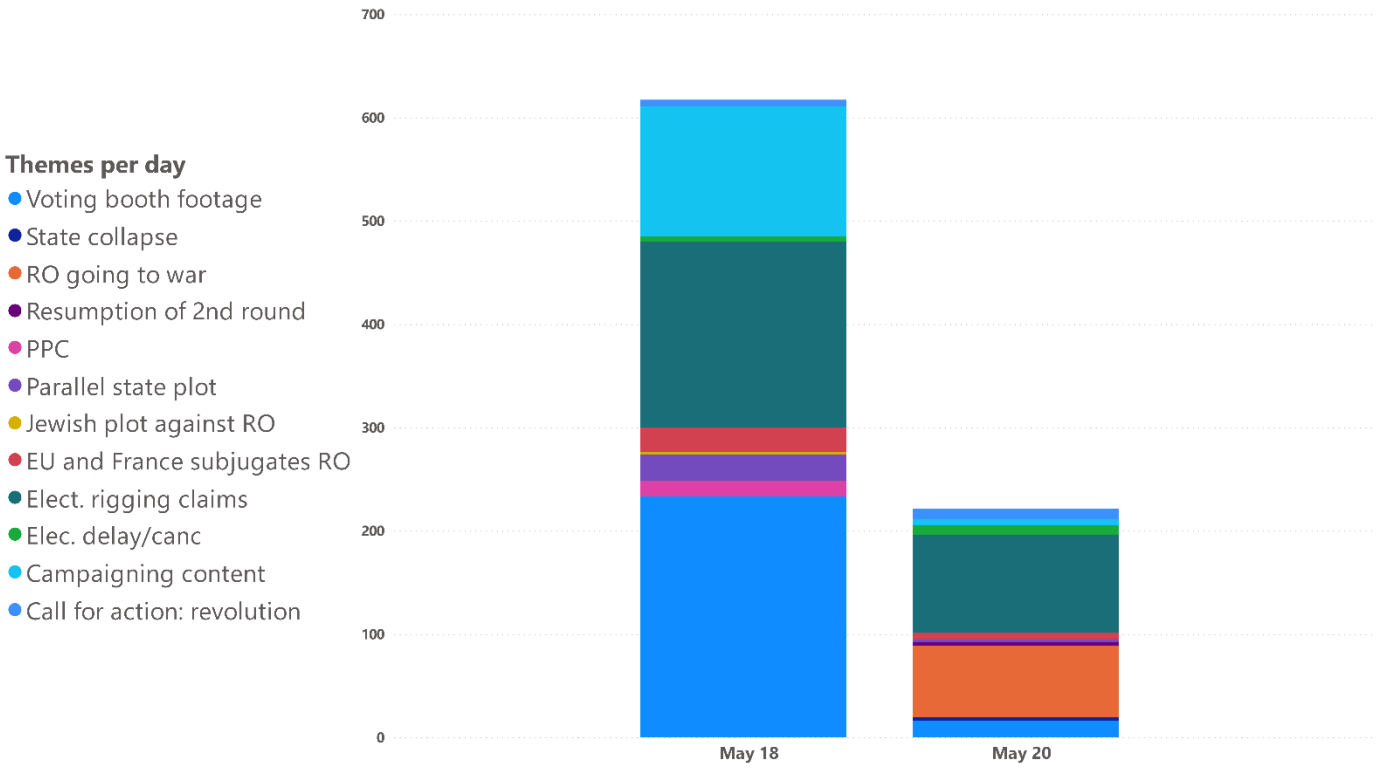

Fig.3 Themes by day

“Voting booth footage” and “Electoral rigging claims” dominated the discourse, suggesting a surge in attempts to delegitimize the electoral process just as voting activity or public focus on the election peaked. These were closely followed by “Campaigning content”, constituting a breach of electoral silence rules through illegal promotion or smear campaigns. Other themes like “Parallel state plot”, “EU and France subjugates RO”, and “PPC” (Premature

Polling Claims) appeared in smaller yet notable volumes, reinforcing an atmosphere of institutional distrust, foreign manipulation, and electoral manipulation.

By May 20, the landscape of narratives had shifted slightly. While “Electoral rigging claims remained prominent”, their frequency dropped indicating a decline but still reflecting sustained effort to undermine election credibility. Notably, “RO going to war” surged marking a dramatic increase in geopolitical fearmongering. Similarly, “Call for action: revolution” and “State collapse” suggest that narratives became more extreme post-election. Further monitoring should follow within the next weeks in order to ascertain the trend of this phenomenon.