

2020 Moldova

Presidential election Social Media Monitoring



This project was supported by

Introduction

Between 1 September and 24 October, 2020, Mediapoint, a Moldovan new media organization, and MEMO 98, a Slovak non-profit specialist media-monitoring organization, monitored social media in the run-up to the 1 November presidential election in Moldova.

The main purpose of the monitoring has been to determine the impact of social media on the electoral process and the extent to which social media serve as a platform to provide important information that voters need in their decision making. While in general, for most people, television remains the primary source of information about politics, the growing relevance of social media inspired us to monitor the use of Facebook and Instagram during the Moldovan elections. According to a survey by the International Republican Institute's (IRI) Center for Insights in Survey Research released in September 2020, the internet and social media are important sources of information people use to access political news and information in Moldova¹.

The monitoring also focused on topics and issues discussed in the context of elections. When it comes to social media, we have focused on profiles of contesting political parties and individual politicians. From a wider perspective, we also wanted to assess the overall role of social media in the elections and their potential impact on election integrity, particularly the level of public trust and confidence in the process.

Mediapoint and MEMO 98 will issue a more comprehensive final report covering the official campaign period as well as the second round (in case it is held) within a few weeks after the elections.



¹ Center for Insights in Survey Research. 2020. Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Moldova July 16, 2020 – August 23, 2020

Social media in Moldova

According to the data from the National Regulatory Agency for Electronic Communications and Information Technology of the Republic of Moldova, by the end of June 2020, 689 thousands of people went online using fixed internet access services, while almost 2.1 mil Moldovan citizens did so by using mobile broadband services. The Digital 2020 report on Moldova released by We are social and Hootsuite indicates a number of 3.07 millions of devices connected to the internet in January 2020.

A survey released by The “WatchDog.MD” Community, in cooperation with CBS Research shows that 54.9 percent of people aged between 18-29 years are using social networks as information resources, while this share decreases with a higher age, with only 14.8 percent of people aged 60+ using social media for information purpose. While people use social media as information resources, the data from the same survey shows that only 21.4 percent of the youth (18-29 years) trust the information they see on social media. The older the group age, the less trust in social media was noted, with only 3.6 percent of people aged 60+ thinking of social media as a trustful source of information².



1.6
million

active social media users
on Facebook and Instagram

It is important to mention that this year, all entities who want to run ads about social issues, elections or politics on Facebook and Instagram in Moldova are required to complete an authorizations process. Facebook policy requires that any advertiser who wants to create or edit ads targeting Moldova that reference political figures, political parties or elections (including “get out the vote” campaigns) must go through the authorization process, place “Paid for by” disclaimers on ads and have these ads enter the Ad Library. This includes any person creating, modifying, publishing or pausing ads about social issues, elections or politics. These persons have to submit an ID issued by the Government of Moldova and to submit it for review to Facebook.

² Watchdog.md (2020) Survey: Socio-political trends and disinformation impact during the pandemic

Presidential election 2020 and COVID-19

The Parliament set the date for the presidential election for the 1st of November. The upcoming election will be the second direct presidential election since 2016 when the Constitutional Court declared the 2000 constitutional revision which required the president to be elected by the parliament, as unconstitutional. The president is elected for a four-year term. The official campaign starts 30 days before election day, on 2 October. By law, campaigning prior to this period, including during candidate registration, is prohibited. The contestants are to participate in elections on an equal basis and have an equal right to use mass media, including public media.

Pandemic-related restrictions and health concerns significantly impacted the conduct of the campaign. The ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission report mentions that “restrictions on ‘in person’ campaigning raised the importance of television and gave advantage to the political forces that control certain broadcast media. These conditions forced contestants to focus on online rather than traditional campaign methods, which will still include small-scale rallies, door-to-door canvassing and distribution of printed materials”.³

³ OSCE/ODIHR. 2020. Needs Assessment Mission report (17-21 august 2020)



Preliminary findings

- In the period between 1 September and 24 October we monitored 37 public pages of political parties and politicians, who produced a total of 3706 posts on Facebook and 514 posts on Instagram. These posts generated a total of 2,706,428 interactions on Facebook and a total of 190,626 interactions on Instagram.
- Facebook was generally far more used compared to Instagram. Only five presidential candidates used their Instagram account as a campaign tool, and in fact no political party relied on this platform to actively promote its candidate. The number of interactions generated on Facebook was 14 times bigger than the one generated on Instagram.
- In the electoral campaign, the most active party was Partidul Nostru with a total number of 343 posts on Facebook, while the most active candidate was Renato Usatîi with 273 posts on Facebook. During the electoral campaign, the number of interactions on the candidates' pages was about 13 times higher than on the parties' pages.
- The most popular candidate on Facebook by the number of interactions was Renato Usatîi while the most popular party was Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate.
- The most covered issues measured by the number of posts of candidates and parties were Roads and Infrastructure, Reunification with Romania, Salaries and Pensions. The fifth most covered topic was COVID-19. In this regard it is important to note that the electoral campaign took place in the context of growing dissatisfaction with the way the government has handled the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Issues that generated most interactions from Facebook users were Salaries and Pensions, Education and Corruptions and bribery schemes.
- The problems of the judicial system as well as those related to pensions and salaries were the most commented issues. The posts regarding the judicial system generated also the most negative emotions on Facebook.
- A total of 70 percent of interactions during the campaign was accumulated by two candidates - Maia Sandu and Renato Usatîi.
- The Youtube platform was not used as a regular campaign tool in these elections. Only two out of eight candidates posted videos on their YouTube channels.
- Politicians and parties registered in the electoral race spent over €40,616 for Facebook and Instagram advertising during a period from 4 August - to 29 October 2020.
- Between 4 August and 29 October, there were in total 3,549 advertisements on Facebook and Instagram in the Republic of Moldova on social, electoral or political issues, with a total value of € 63,590 or about 1.2 million lei.
- Among presidential candidates, Renato Usatii spent the most money on advertising on social issues, elections and politics, starting from 4 August. At the same time, Dorin Chirtoaca was the only candidate who did not use a single euro for promotion on Facebook and Instagram, according to Facebook Ads Library.
- Chisinau, Balti and Ungheni are the top 3 cities where most advertisements on social issues, elections or politics have been delivered in the last 3 months.
- In the 3 weeks of the election campaign (2 - 24 October), the candidates posted an average of 122 posts on Facebook.
- Unlike during the previous elections, the topic of \$1 Billion Bank Fraud is not in the top ten most discussed issues on the pages of politicians and parties.
- "Televiziunea Centrala", was the one that created the most ads on social issues, elections and politics (331 ads created on Facebook and Instagram), in comparison with other media institutions, since 4 August. It was also the media institution that spent the highest budget, according to the Facebook Ad Library.

Facebook posts

Total number of posts by candidates (2–24 October 2020)



Renato Usatîi



Violeta Ivanov



Igor Dodon



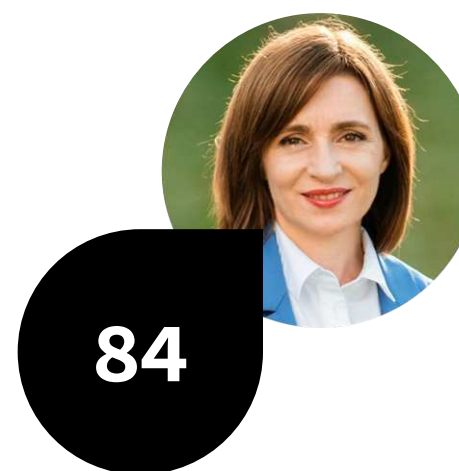
Dorin Chirtoacă



Octavian Țîcu



Andrei Năstase



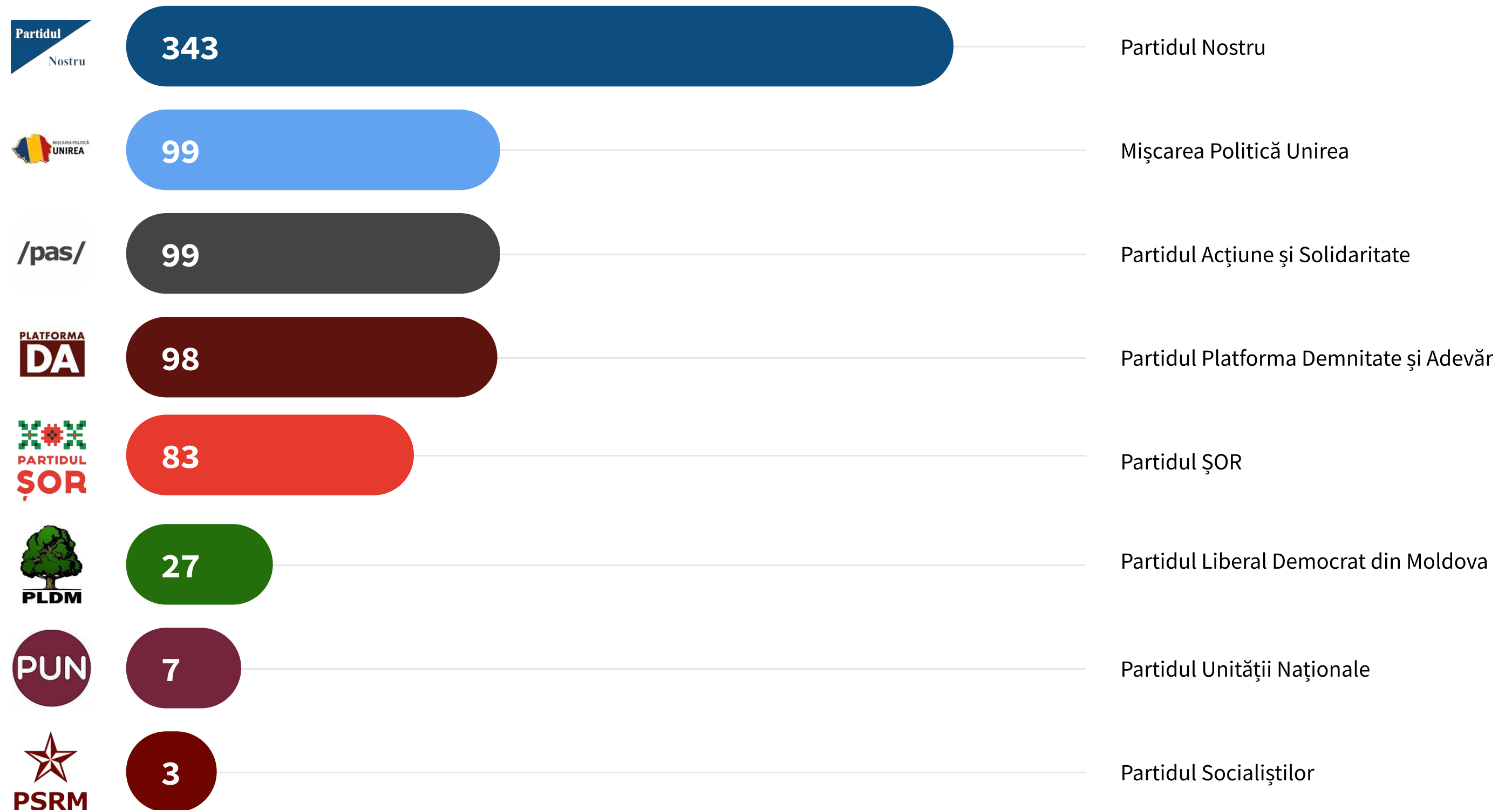
Maia Sandu



Tudor Deliu

Facebook posts

Total number of posts by parties (2-24 October 2020)

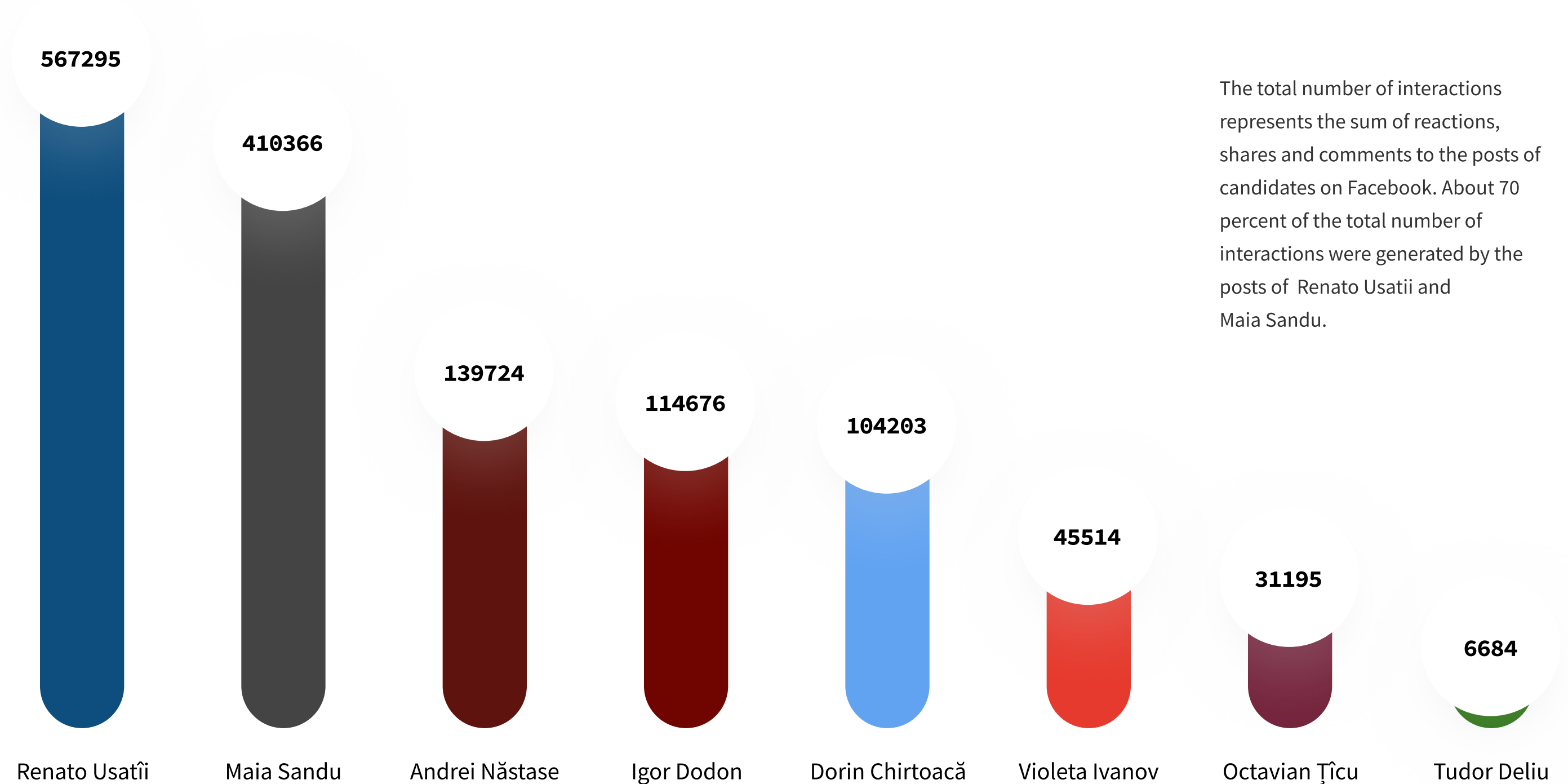


Facebook posts

Total number of interactions with posts of candidates (1-24 October 2020)

1.41

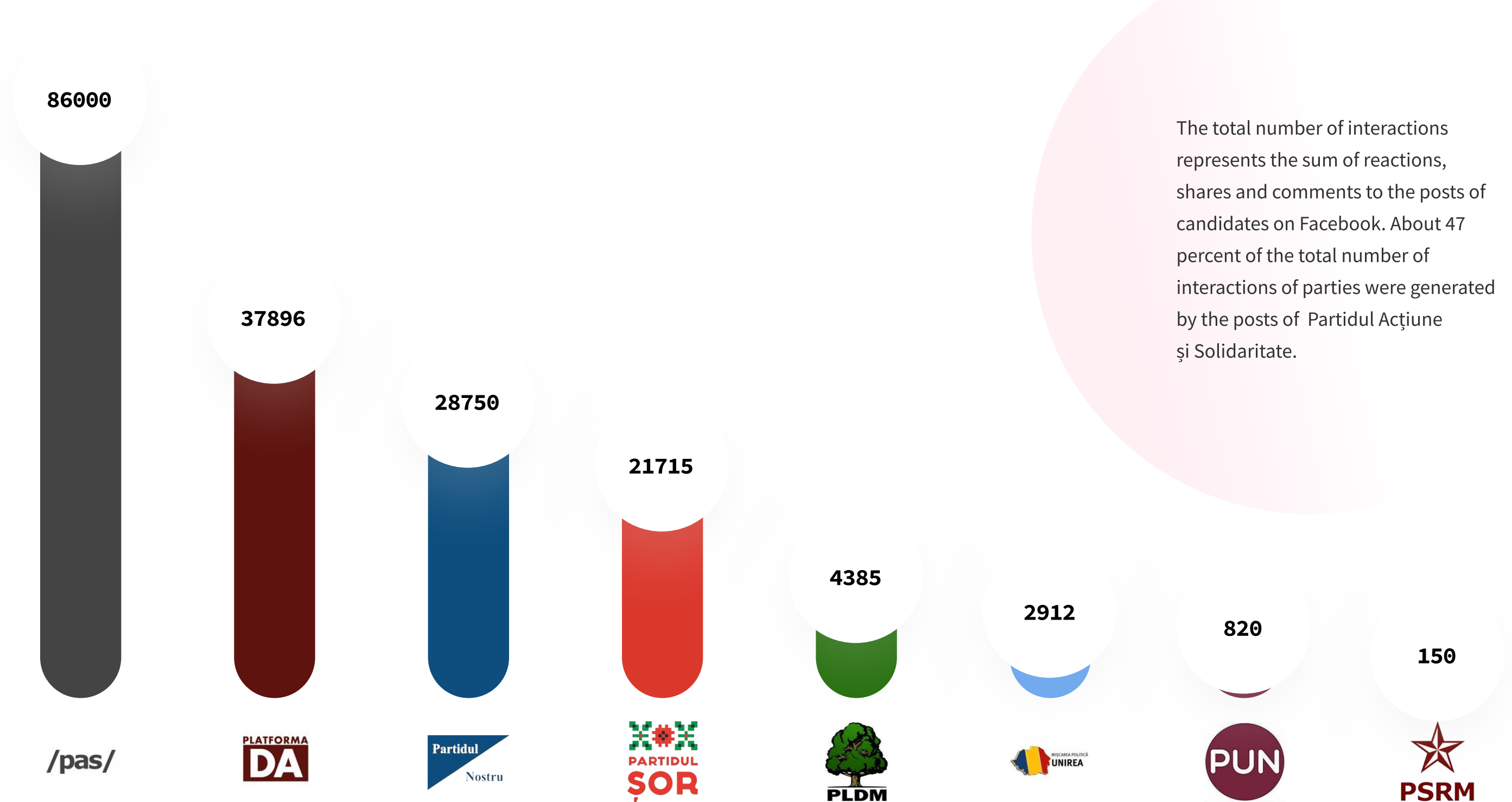
mln total interactions



The total number of interactions represents the sum of reactions, shares and comments to the posts of candidates on Facebook. About 70 percent of the total number of interactions were generated by the posts of Renato Usatii and Maia Sandu.

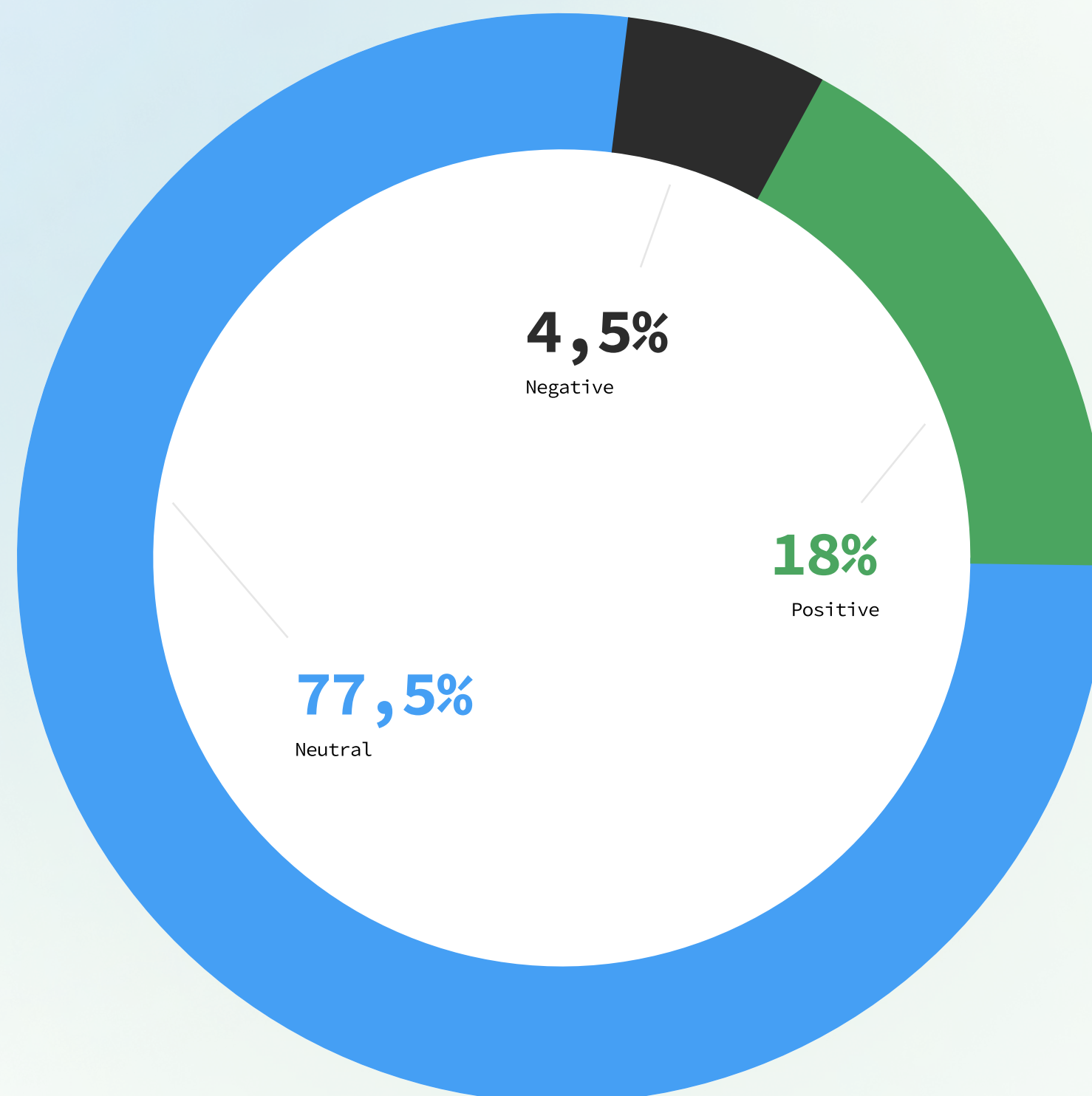
Facebook posts

Total number of interactions with posts of parties (1-24 October 2020)



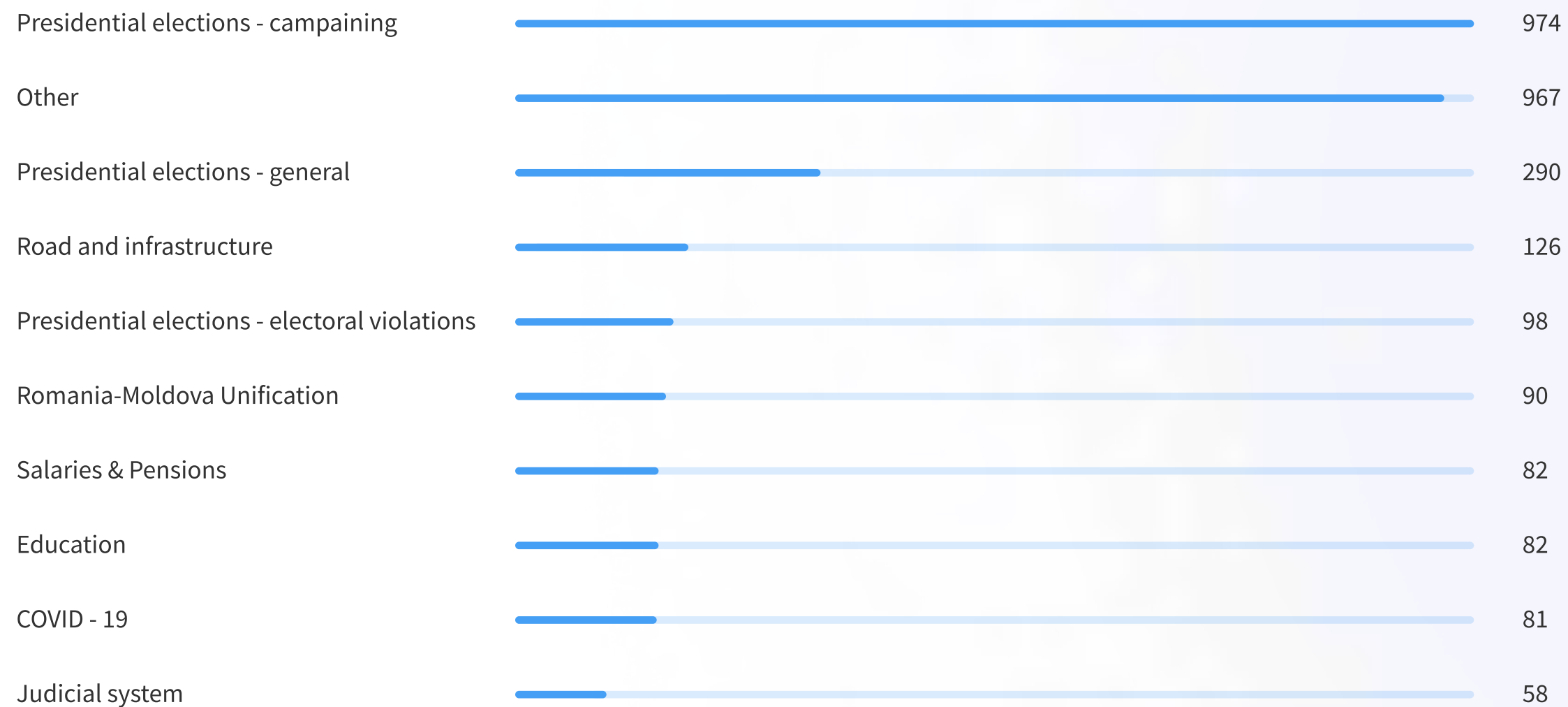
Facebook posts' tone of voice

What was the tone of voice used by politicians and parties in their facebook posts 1.09-24.09.2020



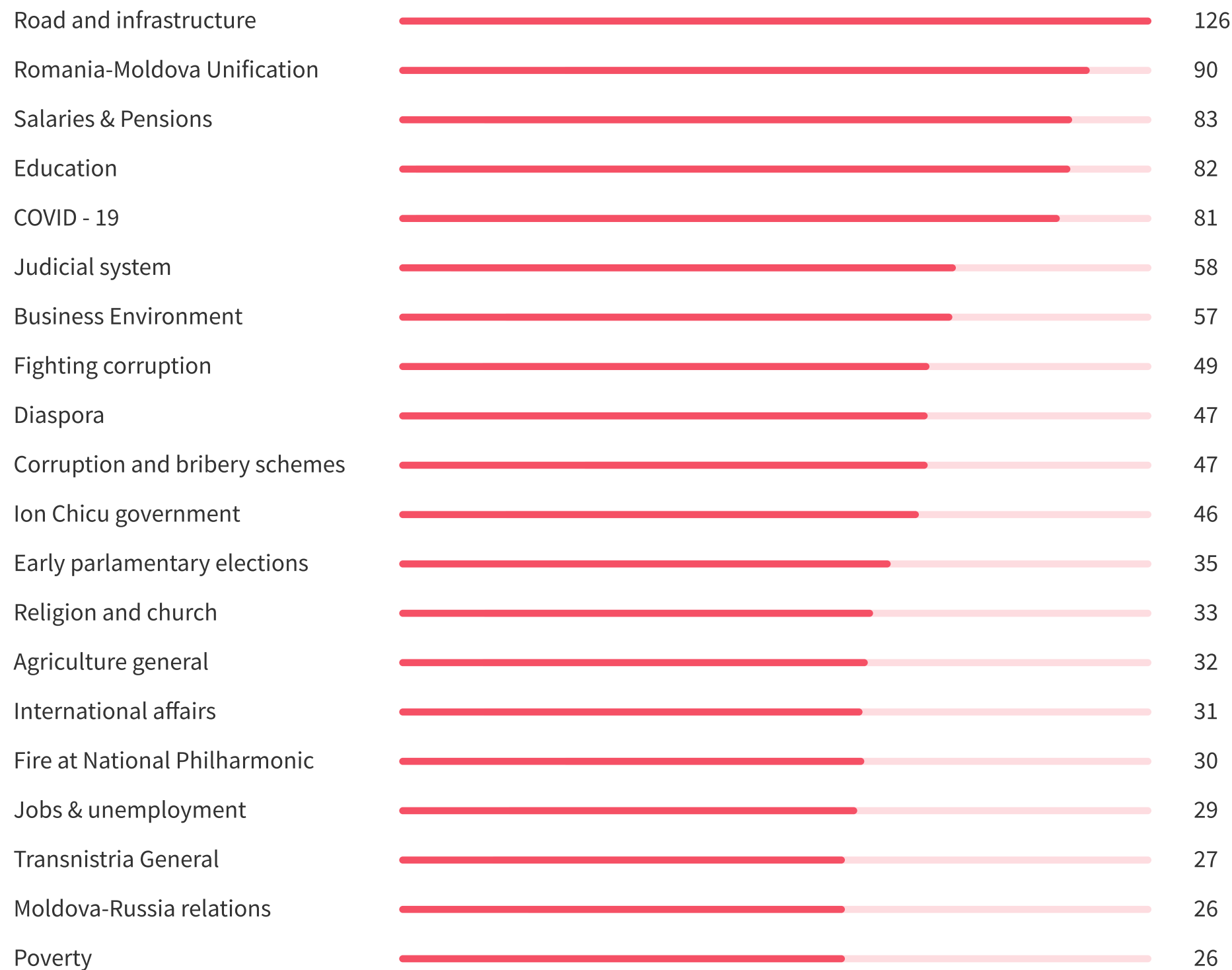
Facebook posts

Top 10 issues discussed by parties and politicians during 1.09 – 24.10.2020



Facebook posts

Top 20 issues discussed by parties and politicians during 1.09 – 24.10.2020



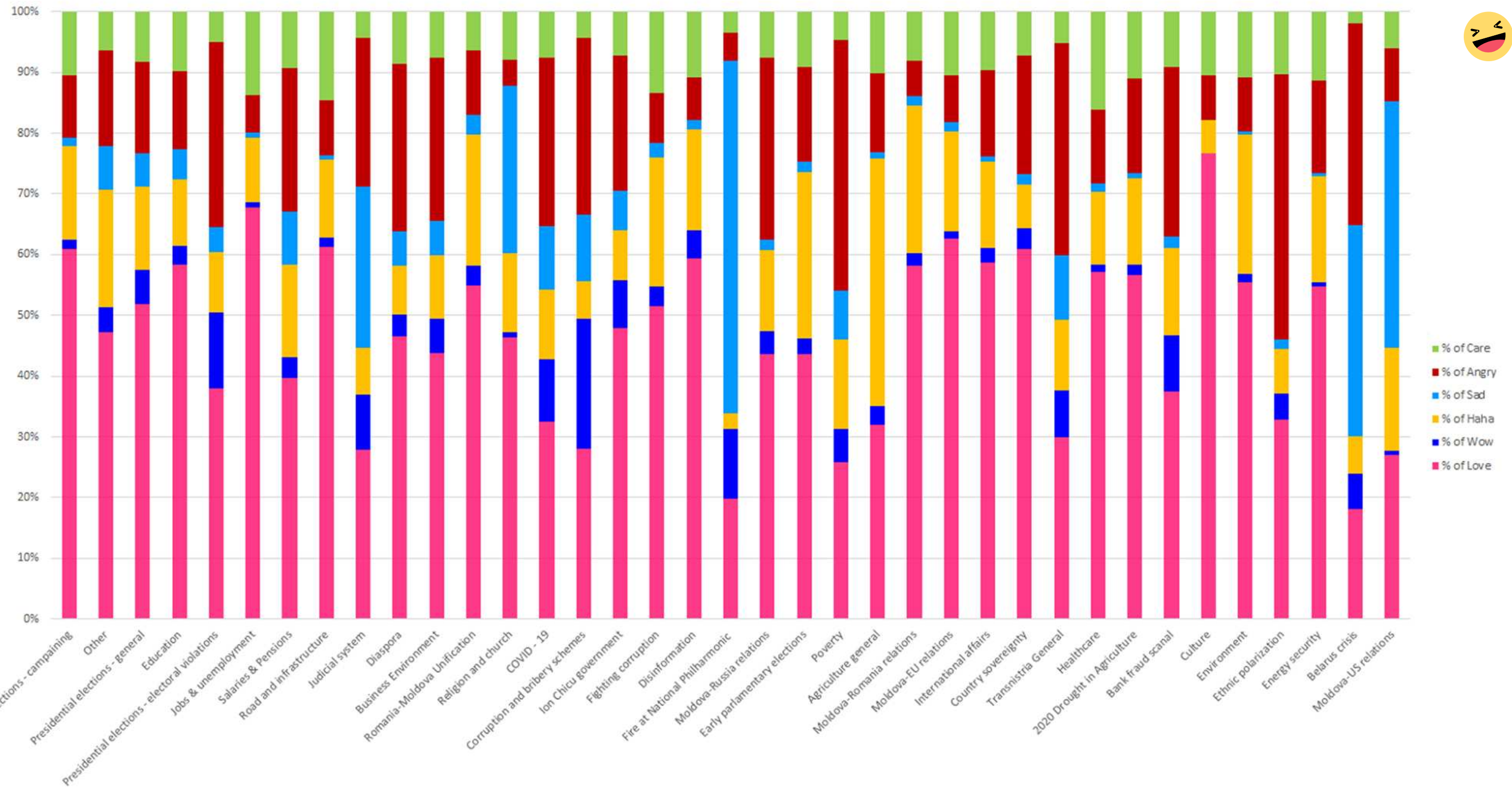
The graph includes issues that were discussed by politicians and parties in their posts on Facebook, excluding the “Other” and the election related categories.



Facebook posts



Citizens' emotions (excluding likes) to posts by top issues 1.09 - 24.10.2020



Facebook posts

Number of emotions that candidates received the most (2-24 October 2020)

Maia Sandu, Renato Usatîi and Igor Dodon were the politicians who accumulated the biggest number of emotions to their posts. Likes were not taken into account since they express general agreement with the post. Maia Sandu got the most "Love" and "Care" emotions, Renato Usatîi got the most reactions of "Wow", "Haha" and "Sad" while Igor Dodon got the most "Angry" emotions.



Facebook posts



Most liked politicians on Facebook (2-24 October 2020)



381018

Renato Usatîi



278320

Maia Sandu



82876

Andrei Năstase



75832

Igor Dodon



63790

Dorin Chirtoacă



26464

Violeta Ivanov



23856

Octavian Țicu

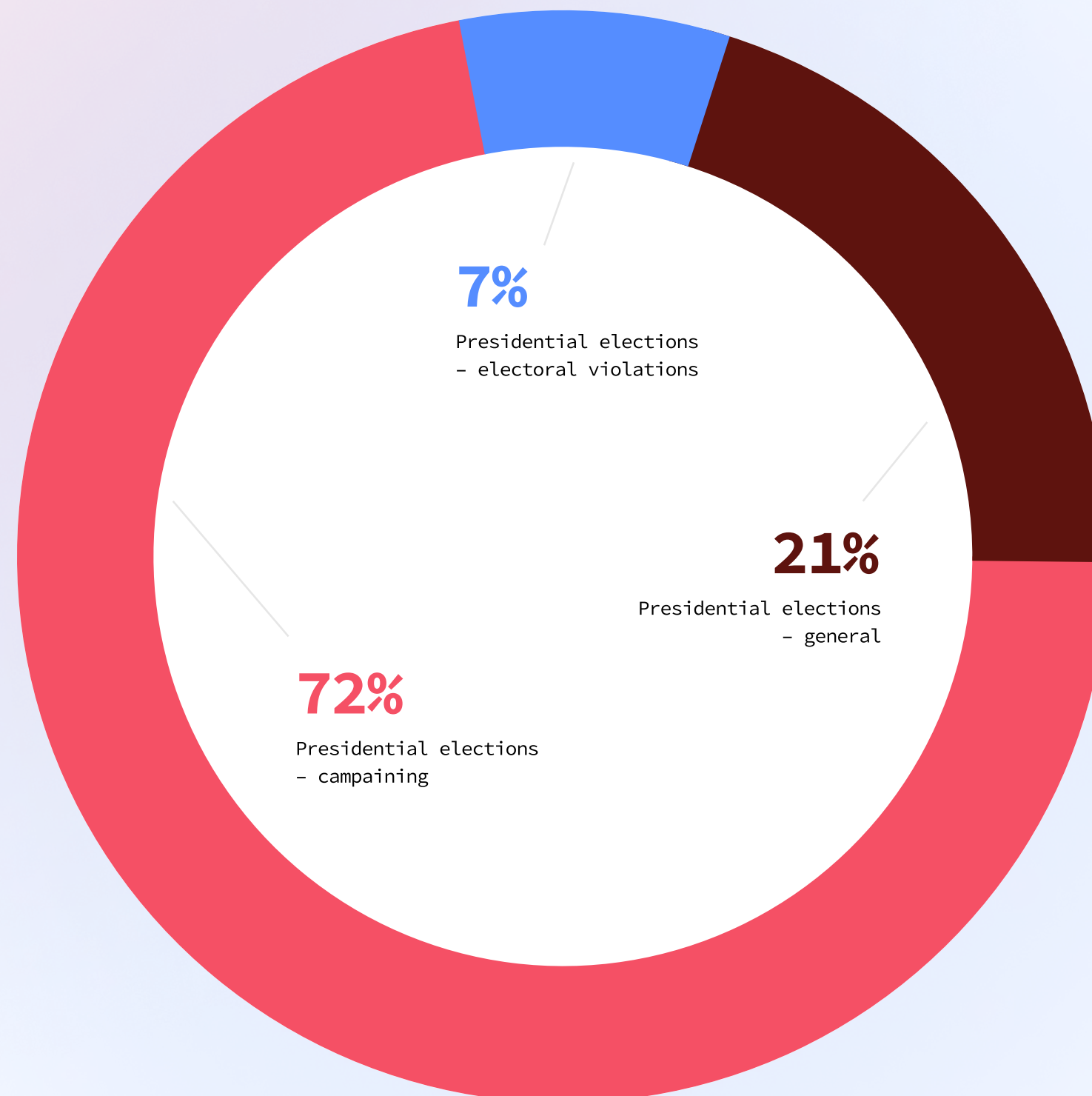


3973

Tudor Deliu

Facebook posts

How politicians and parties spoke about the presidential election (1.09 - 24.10.2020)



Facebook posts

Most popular posts from politicians, parties and the media (1.09 – 24.10.2020)



Онлайн. Dodon fuge de dezbateri. Am decis sa vin după el in oraşul Făleşti. Хочу задать ему ряд вопросов от наших граждан.

Усатый Ренато-Renato Usatii was live.
October 24 at 11:46 PM · 🌐

Онлайн. Dodon fuge de dezbateri. Am decis sa vin după el in oraşul Făleşti. Хочу задать ему ряд вопросов от наших граждан.

957K Views

16K Likes 9.8K Comments 10K Shares



Zeamă în direct, la parlament

TV8.MD
October 16 at 11:00 AM · 🌐

O deputată a mâncat zeamă, a navigat pe internet și a vorbit nestingherit la telefon, chiar în timpul unei ședințe la Parlament. Este vorba despre socialista Alla Dolință, care a participat la ședința online a Comisiei juridice, numiri și imunități fiind într-un local. La un moment dat, aleasa poporului a servit zeamă chiar în fața camerei, sub privirile colegilor. Președintele Comisiei, Vasile Bolea, i-a dorit poftă bună, dar deputata și-a continuat prânzul. Astăzi, aceasta a refuzat să discute cu noi pentru un comentariu.

7K

1.1K Comments 3.1K Shares



Dodon, nu fi fricos, vino la dezbateri

Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate was live.
October 26 at 3:57 AM · 🌐

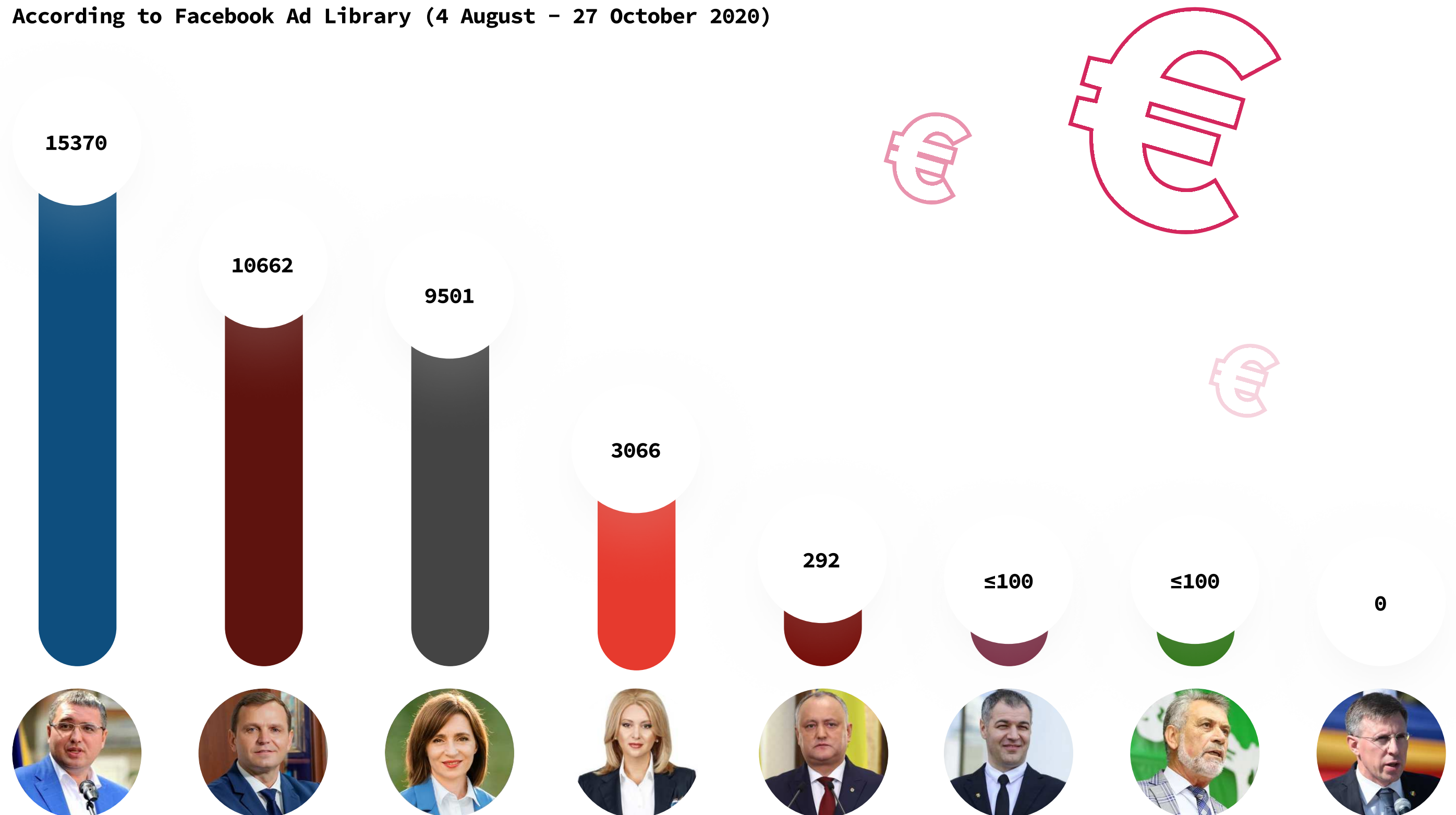
Flashmob la Președinție: „Dodon, nu fi laș, vino la dezbateri”

124K Views

1.5K Likes 439 Comments 940 Shares

Facebook Ads spendings

According to Facebook Ad Library (4 August – 27 October 2020)



Cases of denigration of candidates through false or unverified information

Misleading and false information in the media are gradually dismantled by the organizations that monitor this phenomenon. On social networks, however, mis/disinformation or 'fake' news type of posts are more difficult to control and review. Manipulation practices used during this election period rely on the same old methods: fake information is being published on anonymous pages/channels and subsequently taken over by official publications. False profiles are the first to spread false information. Therefore, it becomes widespread by citizens and sometimes even by high-ranking politicians. In this electoral campaign, at least eleven Facebook pages which distributed derogatory information about the candidates were identified. Although the cumulative number of fans of these pages is around 370,000, the impact generated by them reached a far bigger number. Usually, it is impossible to identify who is behind these pages, instead we can see who they favor or disadvantage.

While most of these pages use a satirical language and a generally accepted critique, some of them spread false information. However, Moldovan citizens have the opportunity to report this information to Facebook in order to be deleted by the platform. To ensure that their fake news is not blocked, their authors resort to a combination of fake news accompanied by proven facts, presented in the form of jokes. Therefore, the visual content becomes more interesting for citizens and with a much greater potential to spread false news.

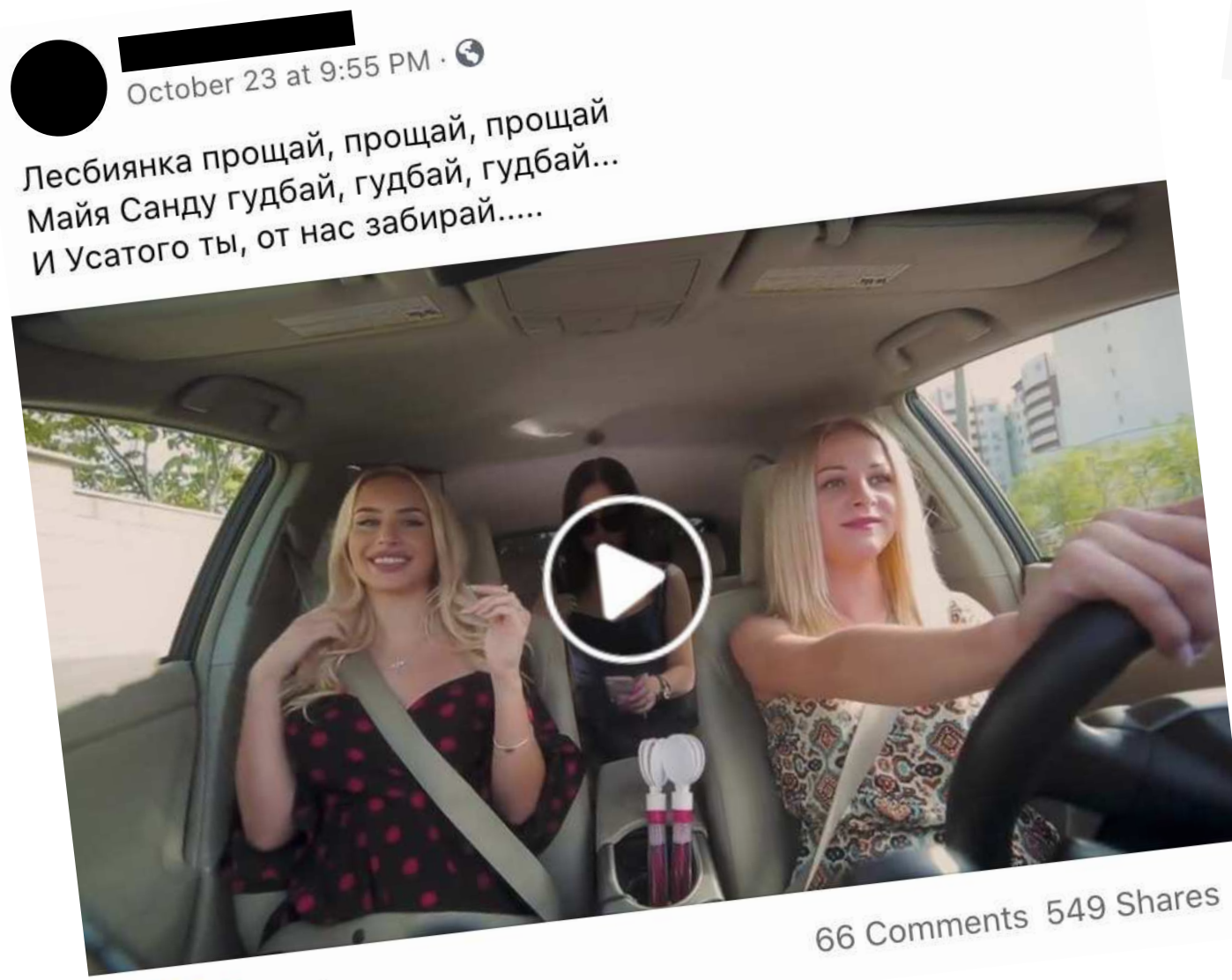
Case study #1

The video with three girls dancing on the background of a well-known Russian song, was published on the YouTube channel "Mort in popsoi". The channel was created on 6 October and contains a single video published in which the presidential candidate, Maia Sandu is criticized. Although the video is placed on an anonymous page, it was republished by the Russian publication "Комсомольская правда в Молдове" ((Komsomolskaya Pravda in Moldova) as a video of the people. At the same time, the video was shared by a user in the group "Молдова должна быть с Россией!" (Moldova should be with Russia!) who talks about "lesbian Maia Sandu", a disinformation practice frequently used in the 2016 elections



Майя Санду давай...
95,670 views · Oct 23, 2020

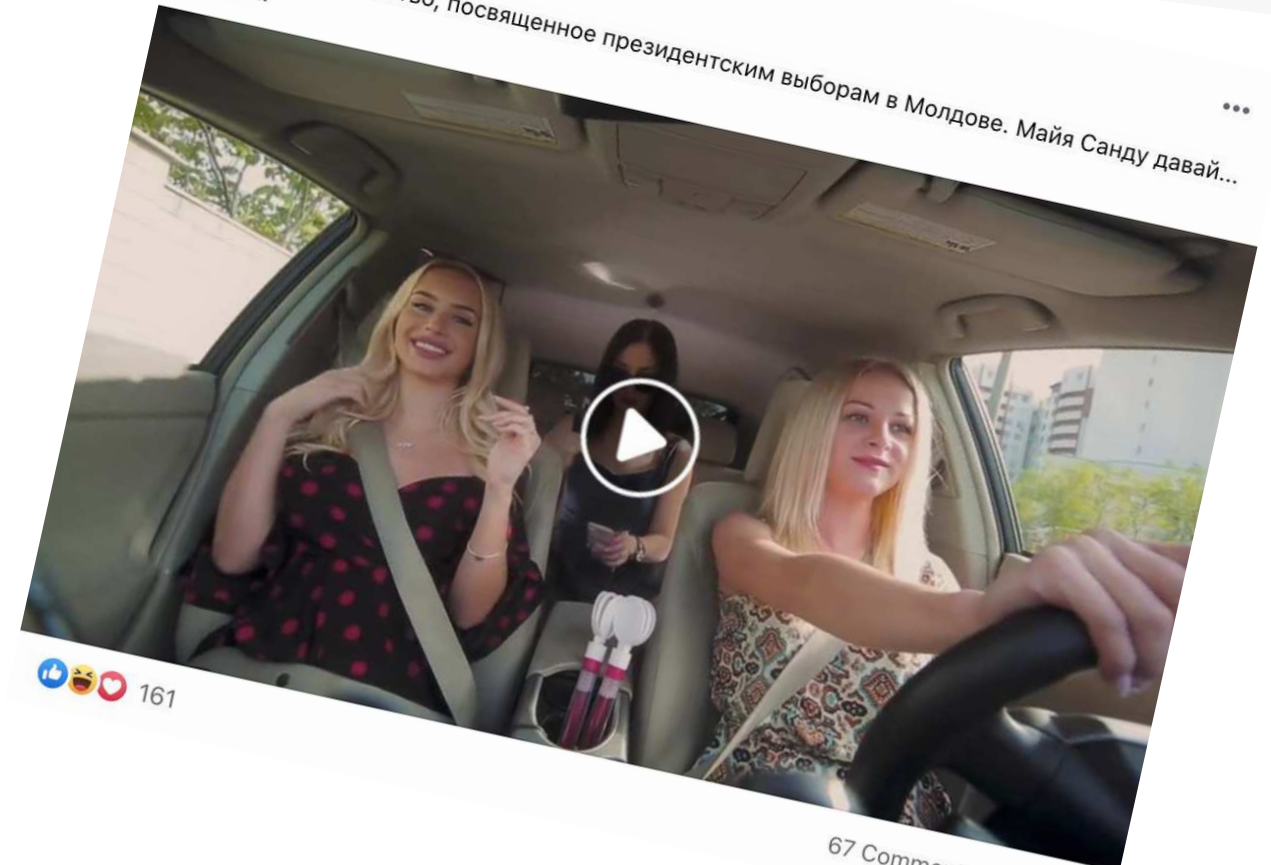
Комсомольская правда в Молдове
October 23 at 8:42 PM · Народное творчество, посвященное президентским выборам в Молдове. Майя Санду давай... Гудбай!
LIKE DISLIKE SHARE SAVE



October 23 at 9:55 PM ·
Лесбиянка прощай, прощай, прощай
Майя Санду гудбай, гудбай, гудбай...
И Усатого ты, от нас забирай.....

401

66 Comments 549 Shares



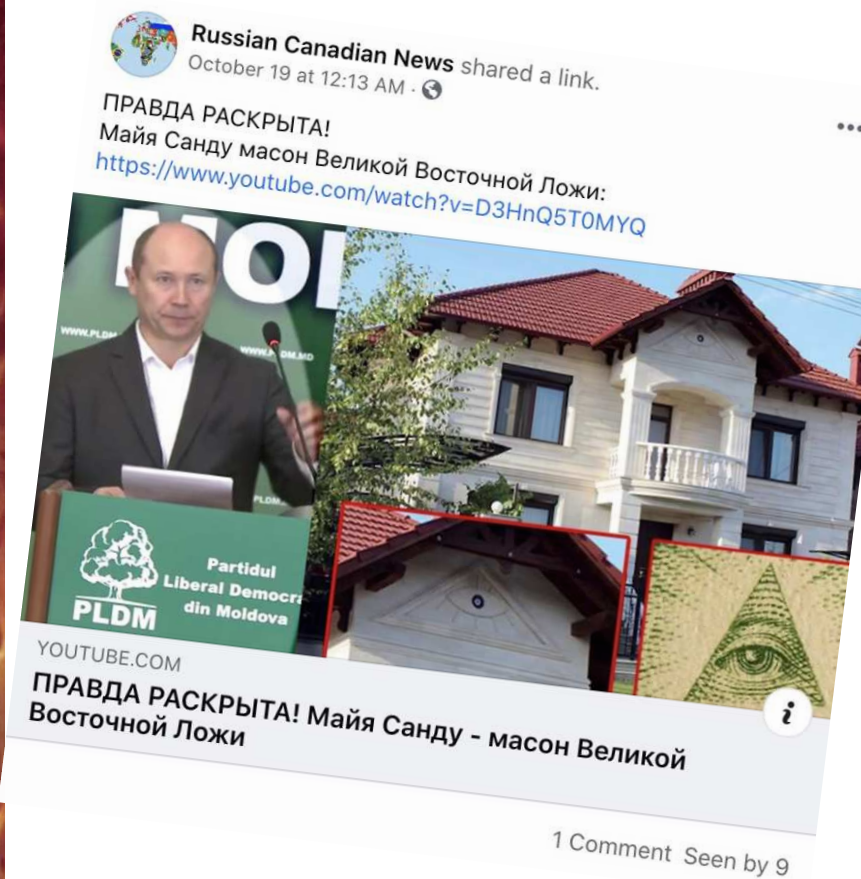
Комсомольская правда в Молдове
October 23 at 8:42 PM · Народное творчество, посвященное президентским выборам в Молдове. Майя Санду давай... Гудбай!

161

67 Comments 77 Shares

Case study #2

"Russian Canadian News" is a page that distributes news and information about the Russian Federation, as well as other countries of the former Soviet Union. Although the Republic of Moldova is rarely found among these news, in the last two months the page has started to distribute false and derogatory information on several groups in Moldova, including the above-mentioned "Молдова должна быть с Россией!" (Moldova should be with Russia!) and "Русско-Молдавская Диаспора в Канаде" (Russian-Moldovan diaspora in Canada). The posts that have been shared on the page are spreading false information about the candidate Maia Sandu. The posts state that she would have closed half of the schools in the Republic of Moldova and that she would have been involved in the 1\$ billion banking fraud. Again, these practices were used in the 2016 elections as well.



Russian Canadian News shared a link.

October 26 at 8:08 PM · 🌐

Укравшая миллиард, закрывшая половину школ в Молдавии, а также являющейся русофобкой ненавидящая Россию, и мечтающей о присоединении к Румынии решила обратиться к русско-говорящим гражданам Молдавии... Видимо её дела очень плохи и чувствует что проиграет на выборах.



POINT.MD

Санду: Мы в Молдове говорим на разных языках, но грабят нас одинаково



1 Share Seen by 4

Case study #3

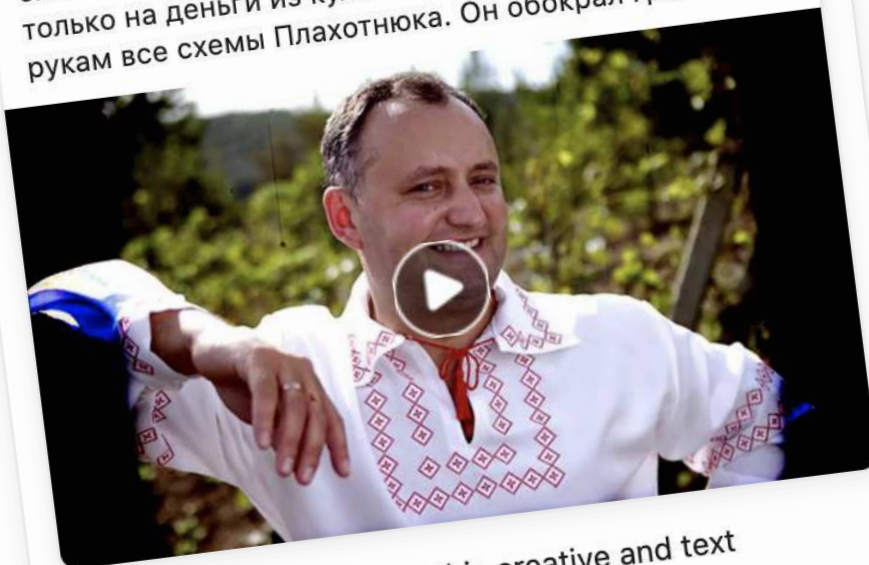
An anonymous page that shared more political information was the "Золотой Теленок" (Golden calf) page. Most of the published information distributed criticizes presidential candidate Igor Dodon. The page was created on 9 June, 2020 and targets Russian speakers. The page stood out by the fact that starting with 4 August, it made advertisements on social issues, elections or politics in the amount of €3261, of which € 2864 between 28 September and 27 October, according to the Facebook Ad Library.

Launched October 2020

Active
Started running on Oct 29, 2020
ID: 2175489802583542

Золотой Теленок
Sponsored · Paid for by ZolotoyTelenok

Игорь Додон - крупнейший бандит в стране, его токсичное правительство выпустило из тюрьмы десятки преступников, вернув 90-е годы. Это самый лживый и коррумпированный политик, за все годы своего мандата он абсолютно ничего не сделал, живя только на деньги из кульков, и в итоге прибрал к рукам все схемы Плахотнюка. Он обокрал граждан...

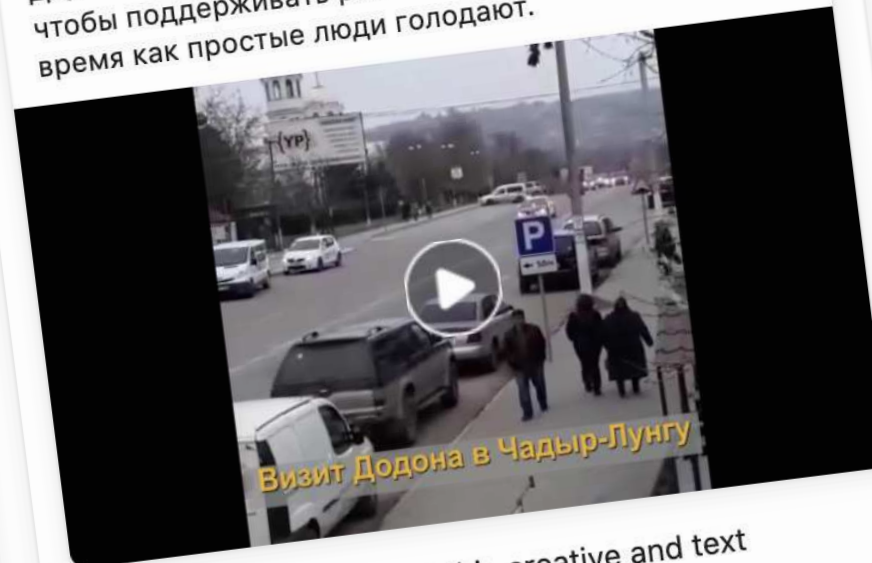


6 ads use this creative and text

Inactive
Oct 22, 2020 - Oct 29, 2020
ID: 705284553686061

Золотой Теленок
Sponsored · Paid for by ZolotoyTelenok

Додон - обычный лжец, он тратит 100000 лей в день, чтобы поддерживать роскошь в Президентуре, в то время как простые люди голодают.



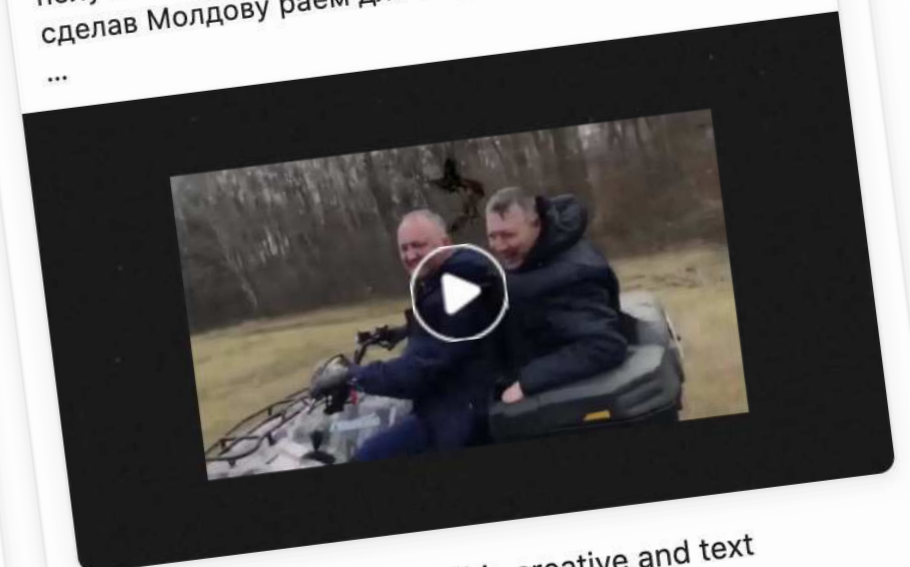
3 ads use this creative and text

See Summary Details

Inactive
Oct 16, 2020 - Oct 29, 2020
ID: 282073029521185

Золотой Теленок
Sponsored · Paid for by ZolotoyTelenok

Игорь Додон - токсичный персонаж, которому наплевать на народ. Он украл миллионы, в то время как люди голодают. В 2016 году он много обещал, но ничего не сделал, и все это время жил из денег полученные в кульке и освобождал воров и бандитов, сделав Молдову раем для мафиози.



4 ads use this creative and text

See Summary Details

Methodology

The applied methodology consists of quantitative and qualitative analysis of the selected social media content.

For this report we analyzed Facebook and Instagram public pages. For the pre-electoral campaign (1 September - 2 October 2020) we analyzed a list of potential presidential candidates, as well as leaders of major parliamentary and extra-parliamentary parties (16) that are active on social media. The monitoring period coincided with the registration period for the elections, so eight of the politicians analyzed became officially registered candidates. We also monitored the Facebook pages of the parties that nominated a candidate or were led by politicians included in the monitoring list (15). For the campaign period (2 - 24 October 2020) we analyzed the social media pages of eight officially registered candidates and the pages of their parties.

The quantitative analysis

focuses on the amount of posts generated by political actors (parties as well as politicians) or other monitored entities. We looked at the engagement statistics such as the number of reactions (likes and other emoticons), shares and comments. This was done in order to determine how active are the politicians and their parties on social media and how are people engaging with their posts. The quantitative data concerning the posts were extracted every three days from 1 September to 24 October, so it might slightly differ from the current engagement data on posts.

The qualitative analysis

means that we analysed the manner in which the actual messages were presented (positive, neutral, negative). We looked at their posts through a predefined list of issues that were addressed by politicians and parties in their posts. We also looked at the tone of the coverage in which selected topics and issues were presented. In case they were promoted they were assessed as positive; in case they were criticized, they were assessed as negative. In case these topics or issues were only introduced without stating any specific position, they were assessed as neutral.

One social media **post** served as a reference and unit of analysis. As such, in order to preserve the total number of posts, in instances with various issues contained in one post, these posts were divided by number of issues.

MEMO98 obtained the data analysed in this report via CrowdTangle.⁴

⁴ CrowdTangle (a social media analytics tool owned by Facebook) "tracks public posts on Facebook, Instagram and Reddit, made by public accounts or groups. The tool does not track every public account and does not track private profiles or groups, so this data is not representative of performance across the entire platform. The numbers shown reflect public interactions (likes, reactions, comments, shares, upvotes and three second views), but do not include reach or referral traffic. It does not include paid ads unless those ads began as organic, non-paid posts that were subsequently "boosted" using Facebook's advertising tools. Because the system doesn't distinguish this type of paid content, note that some high-performing content may have had paid distribution. CrowdTangle also does not track posts made visible only to specific groups of followers."

01. List of monitored parameters

Political parties (15)

Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova
 Action and Solidarity Party
 Democratic Party of Moldova
 PRO Moldova
 The ȘOR party
 Liberal Democratic Party of the Republic of Moldova
 Dignity and Truth platform
 National Unity Party
 Our party
 Democracy Home Party
 Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova
 The Liberal Party
 Labor Party
 Party of Regions
 Political Movement Union

Politicians (16)

Igor Dodon
 Maia Sandu
 Andrei Nastase
 Octavian Țicu
 Pavel Filip
 Renato Usatii
 Andrian Candu
 Dorin Chirtoacă
 Vlad Filat
 Valeriu Munteanu
 Violeta Ivanov
 Tudor Deliu
 Constantin Oboroc
 Toma Serghei
 Alexandr Kalinin
 Ilan Șor

Media (37)

TV Moldova 1
 Pro TV Chisinau
 TVR Moldova
 Primul in Moldova
 Jurnal TV
 Publika TV
 Canal 3
 TV 8
 Diez.md
 Independent.md
 Stiri.md
 Sputnik.md
 Jurnal.md
 Zdg.md
 Anticoruptie.md
 Point.md
 Newsmaker.md
 Kp.md
 Noi.md Romanian
 NTV Moldova
 Accent TV
 Orhei TV
 Televiziunea Centrala
 Unimedia.md
 Agora.md
 Timpul.md
 Telegraph.md
 Noi.md Russian
 Bloknot-moldova.md
 Ziarulnational.md
 Radiochisinau.md
 Tribuna.md
 Cotidianul.md
 Deschide.md
 Realitatea.md
 Radio Europa libera
 Moldova24.md

02. List of monitored parameters

Top issues (42)

World pandemic Covid-19	Bank fraud scandal	Country sovereignty
Covid-19 in MD (general)	Judicial system	Early parliamentary elections
Covid-19 in MD - adopted measures	Fighting corruption	Education
Covid-19 in MD - failure to adopt measures	Corruption and bribery schemes	Diaspora
Covid-19 in MD - health, social implications	Ion Chicu government	Romania-Moldova Unification
Moldova-Romania relations	Fire at National Philharmonic	Culture
Moldova-Russia relations	Ethnic polarization	Healthcare
Moldova-EU relations	2020 Drought in Agriculture	Environment
Moldova-US relations	Disinformation	Agriculture general
International affairs	Road and infrastructure	Energy security
Belarus crisis	Business Environment	Jobs & unemployment
Transnistria - General	Salaries & Pensions	Other
Presidential elections - campaigning	Poverty	
Presidential elections - electoral violations	LGBT	
Presidential elections - general	Religion and church	

About



Founded in 2009, Mediapoint's mission is to innovate the democratic process by involving citizens and unlocking the potential of technology. The organization has launched a series of innovative online projects and conducted over 150 workshops and events nationwide, including three Social Innovation Camps. The Mediapoint priorities for 2020-2030 are: Promoting citizen participation in democratic processes; Improving government transparency and increasing access to information; Facilitating interaction between authorities and citizens through developing digital platforms.

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An internationally recognized, independent, and non-profit specialist media institution with 22 year-long experience of conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. Using tested and approved methodologies and tools, we provide media analysis and media monitoring with tangible results, in particular during election periods. Having participated in more than 120 election observation missions and about 150 media & election-related projects and training in more than 55 countries (in the Commonwealth of the Independent States and the Balkan countries, but also in Africa, Asia, South America, and Middle East), our experts provide assistance on media & electoral and other democratic arrangements.



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