

# Monitoring Facebook. Presidential Elections – Romania, November 2019



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**Monitoring Facebook.  
Presidential Elections – Romania, November 2019**

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Our purpose is to advance expertise by functioning as a platform for cooperation and dialogue among individual experts, NGOs, think-tanks, and public institutions from Romania and foreign partners.

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During November 1-24, 2019, GlobalFocus Center, in cooperation with MEMO98 and Democracy Reporting International (DRI), monitored Facebook during the 10 and 24 November presidential election polls in Romania.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Given the growing impact of social media, the way people consume political information has changed considerably in the past few years. The negative part of this change entails information that is often unverified, decontextualized, and manipulated to affirm or exploit pre-existing biases.

There is a growing awareness that underlying societal grievances can be exploited in the media ecosystem by opportunistic actors, either from outside the country or from inside. Previous studies done by partner organizations in several countries have indicated that these risks are much higher during times of heightened social and political debate, such as elections.<sup>[1]</sup>

The role of social media networks during elections and their ability to spread disinformation have gained increasing attention as a possible threat to the integrity of elections worldwide. It was in this context that we decided to analyse the role of Facebook during the 10 November presidential elections in Romania.

Between 1 – 24 November 2019, GlobalFocus Center, in cooperation with MEMO 98, monitored 102 public Facebook accounts of political parties, candidates, politicians, media, and other influential actors involved in the presidential election. The main goal of the monitoring was to evaluate the importance of Facebook as a means of communication during elections and the potential impact of the messages disseminated through this social media network on election integrity. Moreover, the monitoring tried to evaluate what topics and narratives were presented by politicians, political parties, media, and influencers on their public Facebook accounts in the run-up to the elections and what level of engagement (comments, shares, and reactions, *see also the section on methodology*) they generated.

The monitoring was conducted in the framework of a [project](#) coordinated by Democracy Reporting International and MEMO 98, and funded by Civitates. The project seeks to significantly step up a real-time understanding of social media dynamics by providing a toolkit for social media monitoring during elections, which is to be offered to observer organizations across the EU and beyond. The project builds on the [methodology](#) that DRI, MEMO98, and other experts developed in the context of Supporting Democracy, an EU project.<sup>[2]</sup>

The toolkit will be based on this methodology. It will provide tools and up-to-date information to help observers monitor the influence of social media during elections, providing the basis for responsive advocacy (such as intervention with experts) and long-term advocacy for better regulation. Apart from Romania, the social media monitoring methodology has been tested in Austria, Portugal, Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia.

Facebook (FB) was actively used by virtually all monitored stakeholders. Almost all political candidates registered for this election used official FB accounts in the course of the campaign.

**During November 1-24, 2019, we analysed 14, 575 posts uploaded on 102 FB accounts by presidential candidates (14 accounts), accounts owned by political parties (49 accounts on the national and local level), and 39 accounts by journalists, influencers, and media outlets.**

## II. HIGHLIGHTS

- **Monitoring showed that candidates, political parties, media outlets and influencers used Facebook intensively during the monitored period in the electoral campaign for the presidential election in November 2019.**
- **With a single exception, all presidential candidates used their accounts more or less daily to update voters on their campaign events and to mobilize them to participate in the polls. Posts that encouraged the electorate to exercise their right to vote received the most engagement from the audiences.**
- **Attacks on opponents or their respective political factions by candidates and parties supporting them was the second most used narrative generating the second highest engagement.**
- **We did not reveal any use of disinformation on the official FB accounts of the presidential candidates. At the same time, disinformation was among the main topics discussed during elections on posts by monitored media, influencers and political parties.**
- **FB accounts of local branches of some political parties distributed disinformation to discredit opponents creating confusion and adding to the already existing polarisation among voters.**
- **We measured how present the topic of disinformation was on Facebook in the context of the presidential election and we could pinpoint the incidents that brought the topic into discussion on Facebook.**
- **Disinformation was also discussed as a topic on social media networks by monitored media and influencers especially during the second round of the elections. This can be interpreted as an interest of the public as well as the politicians and the media in the topic, but also, as seen further in the report, that attempts at spreading disinformation was detected by some of the stakeholders we monitored.**
- **Monitoring also showed that “fake news” and “disinformation” have been used by some candidates and political parties in their narratives to discredit sources that criticized them.**

## III. CONTEXT

### III.1 TRUST IN MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN ROMANIA

With 10,150,000 Facebook subscribers (52.3 percent penetration rate) and 14,400,000 internet users as of 2018 (73.8 percent penetration rate)<sup>[3]</sup>, communicating political messages on social media networks (again, with FB being the leader)<sup>[4]</sup> has been gradually becoming the main campaign tool not only for newly-established parties, addressing younger electorate political parties, but also for the traditional ones.

While social media network use is a rather new and continuously developing field in Romanian political marketing (with some political parties setting up social media communication teams that consist of volunteers and paid staff whereas other parties continue to ignore these platforms), there is empirical evidence to suggest the growing importance of this communication tool during electoral campaigns.

The statistics are indicating that the primary source of information about politics is still television. Younger voters (aged 18-34), particularly in the urban areas, turn to the Internet, including social media networks, as an information source<sup>[5]</sup>. At the same time, mainstream media very often just rolls out narratives that started by getting traction in social media networks.

Over the past years, political parties as well as social movements in Romania proved that social media platforms, especially Facebook, have been a valuable tool to mobilize voters during the polls. The best example of this mobilization was in May 2019 during the European Parliament elections when a campaign<sup>[6]</sup> on Facebook through motivational clips and memes circulated by both public and private accounts contributed to a turnout of 49.95 percent which was significantly higher than in the previous EP elections, 32.44 percent.<sup>[7]</sup>

**The increase in turnout was more dramatic in the diaspora, where 944,077 Romanian citizens voted in the second round of the 2019 presidential election<sup>[8]</sup> (in contrast to the second round in the 2014 election when the turnout was only 377,651).<sup>[9]</sup>** The increase was due to the change in the election law which for the first time in 2019 allowed citizens residing abroad to vote over the period of three days at polling stations as well as by mail.

Romania has a large diaspora, with an estimated 9.7 million citizens living abroad, according to the official statistics.<sup>[10]</sup> The targeting of voters abroad is often done through social media by most political parties.<sup>[11]</sup>

Although on a relative smaller scale than during the last European Parliament elections, the diaspora has again played a role during the 2019 presidential election. During the previous presidential election (in 2014), Romanians voting abroad influenced the outcome in favour of the incumbent president – 89.73 percent of the diaspora votes were in favour of Klaus Iohannis<sup>[12]</sup>.



## III.2 PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

According to the most recent survey released in May 2019 by the Romanian Academy, citizens have relatively low general trust in public institutions and politicians.<sup>[13]</sup> The results indicated that the most trusted institutions are the Army (67.9 percent), the Church (56.8 percent), and the Romanian Academy (45 percent). However, the level of trust in political institutions was strikingly low: political parties (8.9 percent), government (12 percent), parliament (9.8 percent). These numbers could be attributed to the corruption scandals involving high political figures/ government officials in recent years. The only exception is the growing trust towards the presidency which was at 41 percent in May 2019.<sup>[14]</sup>

## III.3 THE NOVEMBER 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The President is elected in a two-round system for a five-year term. If one candidate obtains a majority of 50 percent +1 of all registered voters in the first round, he or she is declared the winner. A president can hold a maximum of two mandates.

During the most recent presidential election, the first round was held on 10 November 2019 at the participation of 12 candidates. The runoff between two candidates who received the highest number of votes, the incumbent president Klaus Iohannis (endorsed by National Liberal Party - PNL) and the former Prime Minister Viorica Dăncilă (a Social Democrat), was held on 24 November 2019. The incumbent president defeated Viorica Dăncilă, with 66 percent of the vote against 34 percent. In 2014, he was also supported by the Liberals, but as required by the Constitution, he suspended his PNL membership during the presidential mandate.

By contrast, the former PM Viorica Dancila was nominated by the ruling Social Democrat Party (PSD), following intense internal debates. She was designated to be the official candidate of the PSD for the presidential election on August 24, 2019.<sup>[15]</sup>

The Save Romania Union (USR), the third-largest party in the Parliament by the number of MPs, allied with the newly formed PLUS, a political party initiated by former ministers and government officials in a past technocratic government lead by current MEP Dacian Cioloș. They nominated the USR leader Dan Barna as a joint candidate.

On August 26, 2019, the Romanian Alliance of the Liberals and Democrats -ALDE and the former PM Victor Ponta's Pro Romania party announced the former MEP Mircea Diaconu as their joint candidate. The former president Traian Basescu's People's Movement Party (PMP) nominated Theodor Paleologu, the former Minister of Culture, as a candidate on August 25, 2019. In July 2019, the virtually unknown Ramona Ioana Bruynseels also launched her candidacy, positioning herself as a centrist politician and the candidate of the Humanist Power Party, a party controlled from behind the scenes by the media mogul and former-Securitate collaborator Dan Voiculescu, who was jailed for corruption.<sup>[16]</sup>

Another presidential candidate was Alexandru Cumanasu<sup>[17]</sup>, a controversial civic activist-turned politician born in the Southern town of Caracal, who became known to the public at the beginning of 2019 when his niece was murdered by a serial killer after the local police failed to respond to her distress call from the kidnapper's home.<sup>[18]</sup> The former MEP Catalin Ivan also announced his candidacy at the end of 2018. In 2018 he was excluded from the ruling Social Democrat Party after a row with its then-leader Liviu Dragnea. The head of the Democrat Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) Kelemen Hunor ran for the third time for the Romanian presidency.<sup>[19]</sup>

As for other candidates running, these included: a lawyer and the former MP Ninel Peia<sup>[20]</sup>; 36-year-old veterinarian Sebastian Popescu who was the youngest candidate; the former MP and minister Bogdan Stanoevici; the business tycoon Viorel Catarama<sup>[21]</sup>; and John Ion Banu, a Romanian living in Florida, US.

Most of the 14 candidates had already set up their Facebook official accounts to promote their political agendas prior to the launch of their campaigns and all of them maintained a certain degree of interaction with voters and supporters on this platform.

Some candidates, such as Mircea Diaconu or Alexandru Cumanasu, set up new Facebook pages to promote their presidential bids, while others, such as Klaus Iohannis or Viorica Dancila, used the follower base of their already active accounts.

We did not monitor Twitter or other social media networks because only few politicians use them for political communication and rarely for electoral purposes.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The issue of social media, especially in connection with the spreading of disinformation, has gained increasing attention as a possible threat to the integrity of the election process worldwide. Given the increasing potential impact of social media platforms during elections, we decided to analyse the role and importance of Facebook during the 10 and 24 November presidential election in Romania.

More specifically, we analysed the official Facebook profiles of selected stakeholders – registered candidates, political parties, influencers/journalists, and media outlets. Taking into consideration the popularity ratings and status of stakeholders within the election process, we decided to focus on 102 accounts/profiles. According to the Global Digital reports published by *We Are Social Ltd.* in 2019, Facebook was the first and most popular and widely used social media platform in Romania.

In the first phase of the process, we used the data provided by Newship, which extracted data from the public Facebook accounts of the selected stakeholders' profiles into Microsoft Excel sheets. This enabled us to collect information on the type of post, post link, post message, picture, the time of posting, interactions, likes, shares, comments, reactions, other forms of engagement. Consequently, we further analysed the actual content of the posts and coded it according to a list of narratives & topics (*see the list in Annex1*) taking into consideration various aspects ranging from more general topics and issues (such as social issues, gender equality or education) to more local & specific issues and narratives (such as the fight against corruption and anti-corruption protests).

While monitoring Facebook, we paid attention to potential external and internal disinformation efforts aimed to undermine citizens' trust in democratic institutions and elections as such. We were interested to see if such narratives were used by any political parties/stakeholders involved in the elections to spread disinformation and confusion.

In the long-term context, our intention was to focus on the social drivers, and thus the frustrations that are permeating into ever-wider national, European and international sphere and are implicitly reflected in some of the narratives. In this aspect, we focused on pan-European concerns and narratives, such as the rise of xenophobia, racism, discrimination of any kind, hate speech/ill intended speech, persistence on traditional values and posts promoting a colonial view of the European Union as the foreign power that dictates.

In general, we also wanted to evaluate if narratives such as disinformation were present on the monitored accounts and whether they received any significant attention.

We also looked at potential signs of hate speech (used in the posts) as well as attempts aimed at the discreditation of opponents by using false/manipulated information. Finally, we also tried to determine if Facebook posts were focusing on important public policy issues, or they only tried to grab attention by focusing on scandals, conspiracies, and myths.

Drawing from the experience in previous similar activities analysing manipulation in the political and other forms of public discourse (some of them taking place during European Parliament 2019 elections) and taking into account the present situation in Romania, we have identified over 100 narratives and topics. Some of these narratives are of a more general character, such as traditional values, nationalism or education, whereas some others are more concrete ones such as women's rights or the fight against corruption.

During the monitoring period, we analysed 14,575 posts uploaded on FB by the 102 selected actors, including candidates, national and local branches of political parties, media and influencers. Prior to the beginning of the monitoring, we prepared a list of 117 topics and narratives (*see the list in the Annex*) related to the elections.

Social media monitors analysed each post and matched it with one of the narratives compiled in the above-mentioned list, whenever the situation permitted. If the narrative of the post was not included on the list but it was linked to the elections, we amended the list in the course of the monitoring.

If, however, the narratives had no direct or indirect connection to the elections, monitors classified such narratives under "other issues" category.

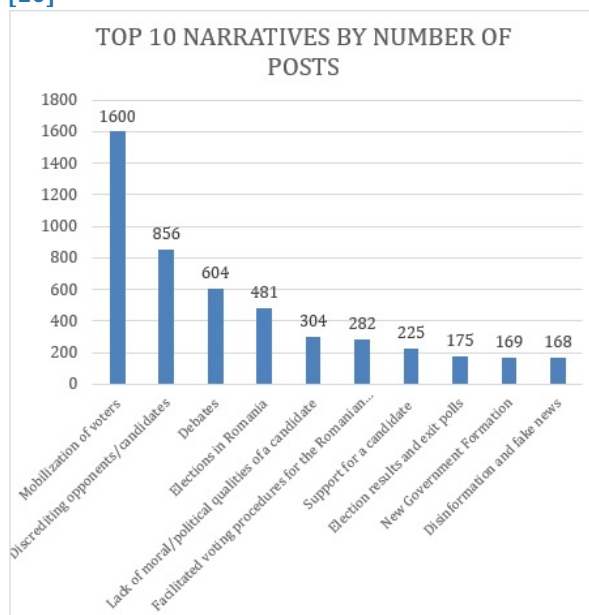
## V.FINDINGS

As far as content was concerned, during the electoral campaign candidates, as well political parties involved in the campaign used a variety of means of communication, from text and pictures to videos (live, or edited sequences), as well as infographics.

It should be mentioned that even if candidate FB accounts refrained from using disinformation, many used harsh language to attack and discredit opponents, including corruption accusations that polarised voters. However, especially during the second round, some political party accounts, mainly belonging to local branches, shared content that disinformed, which created a certain level of confusion among supporters of political parties that no longer had a candidate in the runoff and prompted a heated debated in the mainstream media as well as on the FB accounts of media outlets we monitored.<sup>[22]</sup> This is why we dedicated a section of this report to this aspect of the electoral campaign on social media.

Taking into consideration that the attention and interest of both online and broadcast media were focused on the candidates who were deemed favourites by opinion polls, Facebook became the most important alternative platform of communication for independent candidates or for candidates who were supported by non-parliamentary political factions. It is the case of Alexandru Cumanasu, an independent, as well as Ramona Ioana Bruynseels, supported by the small Humanist Power Party, who both turned to Facebook to engage with voters and build a follower base. Cumanasu, in particular, a newcomer on the political scene, heavily used the live video tool to advertise his presidential bid on the social media platform.

[23]



Among all the topics and narratives related to elections, 1,600 posts (approx. 10 percent) were devoted to mobilizing voters, 856 posts to discrediting opponents or candidates, 604 posts were signalling the lack of proper electoral debates, 481 posts to “Elections in Romania” in general (organization of elections, general campaign atmosphere, general voting information such as voter turnout etc.) and 304 posts to specific lack of moral or political qualities of a specific candidate (a topic separate from discrediting of adversaries due to the fact that attacks were based on personal grounds).

The monitoring results indicated a significant amount of communication noise during the elections. As many as 8,944 posts (no less than 61.3 percent) were assessed by monitors as not having neither direct nor indirect links to elections and thus were classified under “other issues” category.

In fact, media outlets and influencers deemed the electoral campaign for the November presidential election as a “non-campaign”, given the fact that it triggered such little debate across media platforms (both traditional and social

media)<sup>[24]</sup> and that the fall of Dancila’s government during the campaign for the presidential election stole the spotlight.

The topics of disinformation and the spread of fake information/fake news were not observed as used widely during the electoral campaign, but they did come out among the top 10 most discussed topics on social media in relation to the November elections, with 168 posts dedicated to this topic by various accounts, especially by media and influencers.

One incident that generated heated debate among Facebook users was the spread by several Social Democrat politicians, including the mayor of Bucharest Gabriela Firea, of claims that the incumbent Klaus Iohannis was wearing earphones during a press conference. Iohannis did not address the matter directly on his FB account, but several high-profile media outlets debunked this fake information.



Figure 1. A post by G4media news outlet debunking the fake news on the alleged earphone of the incumbent Klaus Iohannis.



Figure 2. A follow-up post from G4Media news outlet explaining that the source of the fake info on Iohannis' earphone deleted the initial post.

The second round of debate on disinformation and fakes spread on social media was occasioned by the displaying of a series of banners/billboards by the Arad county local branch of the Social Democrat Party, which copied the font and modified slogans of rival USR-PLUS, the alliance between Save Romania Union and Renew Europe's member PLUS, asking supporters of their presidential candidate Dan Barna – who came third in the first round –to boycott the second round.



Figure 3. The post by PSD Arad mimicking the USR-PLUS campaign banners.

Several media outlets, including the Romanian offshoot of Radio Free Europe, posted on their accounts and debunked the fakes.



Figure 4. A post with a link to a Radio Free Europe article accusing the Social Democrat Party of spreading false information and creating confusion during the electoral campaign for the second round of the presidential election.

The third incident/example of smear campaign against a political candidate, carried out on social media were the xenophobic comments of the former Social Democrat labour minister, Olga Vasilescu, regarding the PSD opponent, the incumbent Klaus Iohannis. The PSD leader referred to Klaus Iohannis – a German ethnic - as “a concentration camp commander”. She later apologized for her remarks.

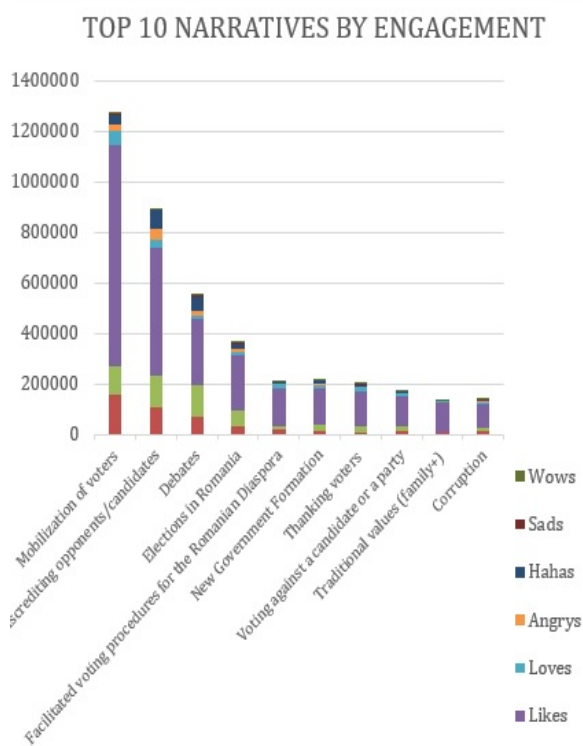


Figure 5. A post by Adevarul news outlet quoting Vasilescu on Iohannis.

Another highlight of the electoral debate on Facebook was the tendency of media outlets to ridicule Viorica Dancila, the Social Democrat presidential candidate, by highlighting her gaffes.



Figure 6. A post by Adevarul daily on Viorica Dancila's "gaffes", highlighting that she signed as "S&D chef" instead of "S&D chief" during her MEP mandate.



Overall, looking at all 102 monitored accounts, the narratives that generated the most engagement were those mobilising voters, calls for the electorate to exercise the right to vote coming from various sources (media, candidates, politicians, influencers).

Given that Facebook proved to be one of the most important means to mobilise the electorate during the European Parliament elections in May 2019, parties and candidates, but also civic activists and influencers found on Facebook the most direct way to communicate to the electorate the importance of their participation in the election.

However, the second most engaging narrative was discrediting of candidates or of opponents, followed by the one signalling the lack of a proper electoral debate during the campaign for both rounds.

The latter was also the most commented topic during the campaign: the refusal of both Dancila and Iohannis to confront other candidates and each other in open debates generated a lot of debate in traditional media as well as on social media.

## V.1 Candidate accounts

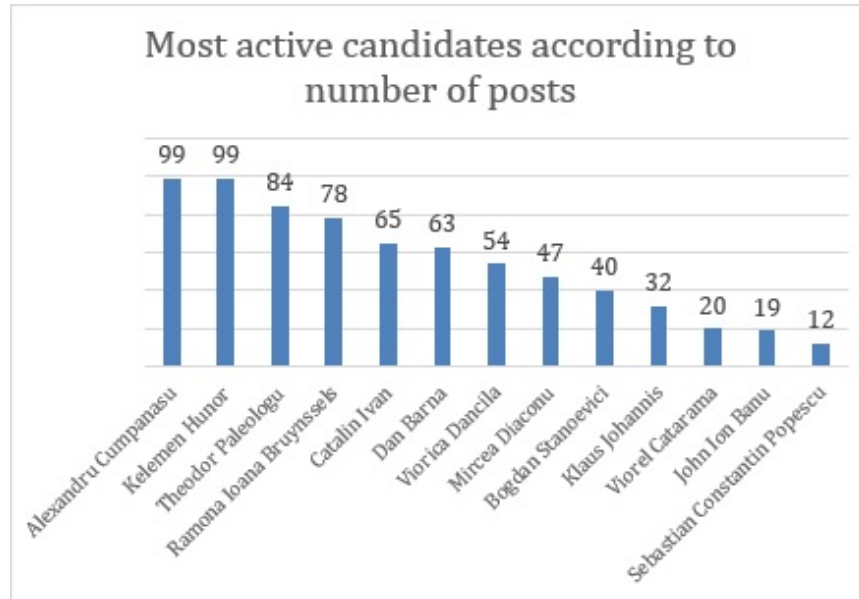
Candidates produced 712 posts on Facebook between 1<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of November which generated a total of 2,765,318 interactions (1,817,573 likes; 246,296 shares; 391,979 comments).

Focusing on 712 posts of 14 presidential candidates, we were able to determine:

1. what were the main issues of focus by each monitored actor,
2. which topics/narratives generated the highest level of engagement (comments, shares, and reactions) among followers.

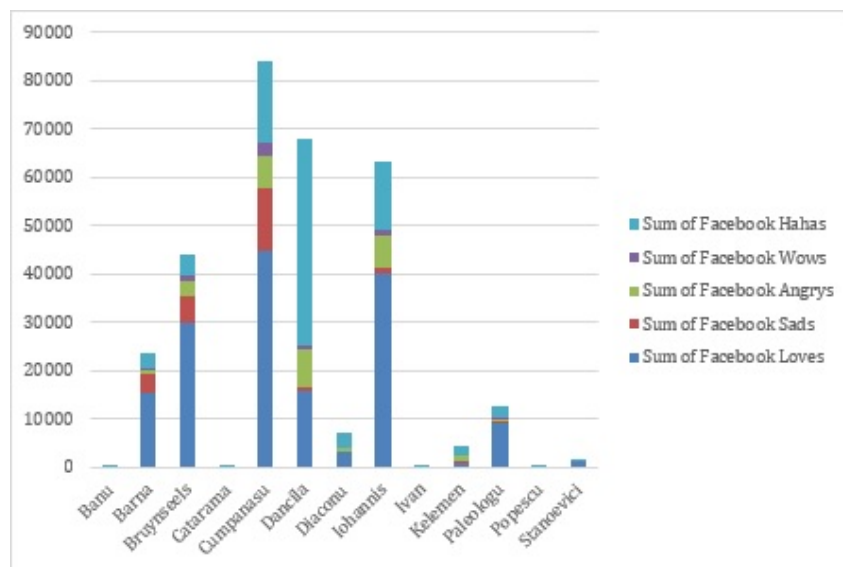
From 1 to 24 November, the incumbent president Klaus Iohannis, who won the election, was only the 10<sup>th</sup> candidate when it comes to the number of posts (only 32 posts during the period) but his posts gathered the biggest number of interactions – 654,090 – and gathered the greatest number of likes – 481,391.





\* 14<sup>th</sup> candidate, Ninel Peia, stopped updating his Facebook official candidate page at the end of August 2019.

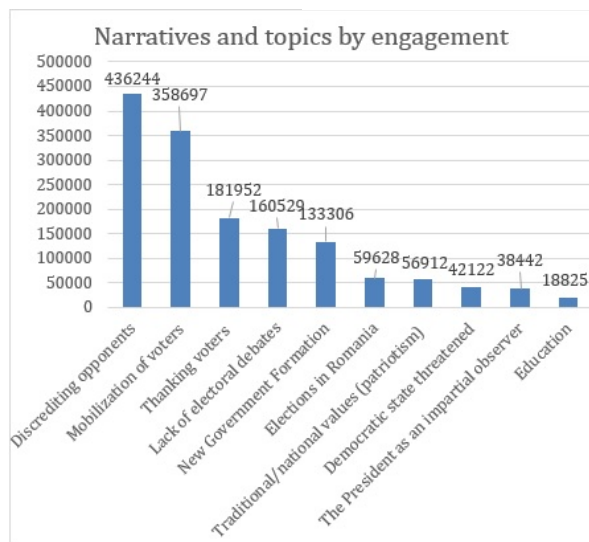
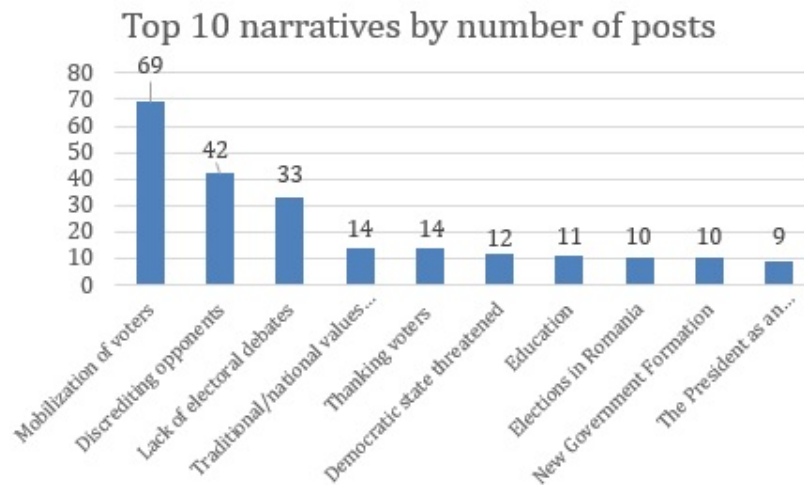
He is followed by the independent candidate Alexandru Cumpanasu, whose activity on Facebook was very intense during the campaign. Alexandru Cumpanasu had 99 posts during the monitoring period, which gathered 604,394 interactions. He was also a leader when it comes to the total number of shares – 50,850, as opposed to 46,800 shares of Iohannis' posts. Alexandru Cumpanasu's posts received the biggest number of comments – three times more than comments on posts by the incumbent president.



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When it comes to the topics employed most by candidates in their Facebook posts, these included mostly calls to mobilize voters to the polls, various forms of discrediting opponents and/or their respective political parties, the lack of formal political debates among top candidates and the refusal of the top candidates to participate in direct debates.

Some of these posts combined calls to vote with attacks directed against opponents with appeals to national values, Romanian identity, and patriotism.



We also analysed the level and type of engagement of the monitored narratives and topics.

The most engaging narrative was, overall, discreditation of other candidates on the basis of their lack of competence or on moral grounds, which generated 436,244 engagements on all 13 pages of the candidates who posted messages during the electoral campaign.

Mobilizing voters to get out and vote was another high-engagement topic. Posts by candidates to thank supporters after the first round were also very engaging and the lack of electoral debates in classic format also triggered many reactions from Facebook users.



## Klaus Iohannis

Iohannis' preferred narrative was to discredit his main rival Viorica Dancila and the Social Democratic Party (PSD) - 12 posts on this topic during the monitored period. He also posted six times in support of the new Liberal government led by Ludovic Orban.

The post which generated the most interactions was on November 10, after the exit polls, when he thanked voters for the first round.



At the time when the monitoring ended, this post generated 66,307 interactions, 51,070 likes, and 2,621 shares, as well as 5,242 comments.



## Viorica Dancila

Dancila preferred to attack her direct rival, Klaus Iohannis, and posted 16 messages criticizing him harshly. She also used Iohannis' refusal to face her in a direct debate in the second round to attack and discredit him. She used this topic in 14 posts.



The post that generated the most interactions was posted on November 19 and it attacked Iohannis for not being a president present enough in the public sphere. It generated 11,374 interactions, 5,715 likes, 1,281 shares and 2,451 comments.



**Lupta continuă  
la alegerile locale  
și parlamentare.**

USR plus

Dan Barna ✓  
@DanBarnaUSR

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## Dan Barna

Barna posted 189 times during the monitored period, and he used his Facebook public account mostly to mobilize voters to go to the polls: 11 posts called the electorate to vote. Next in his preference was the lack of infrastructure, including road infrastructure (5 of his posts included this topic).

Barna's most-liked post gathered 19,299 interactions during the monitored period, 13,368 likes, 541 shares and 1,740 comments.



Dan Barna  
November 11, 2019 ·

Vă mulțumesc tuturor celor care ați avut încredere în mine și în Alianța USR PLUS la aceste alegeri. Le mulțumesc în mod special celor din Diaspora pentru prezența istorică de astăzi.

Potrivit datelor pe care le avem în urma numărătorii paralele, nu am reușit să intrăm în turul 2. Am sperat până în ultimul moment, dar nu avem suficiente voturi.

Dincolo de voturi, această campanie a însemnat sute de mii de români cu care am vorbit, lucrurile pe care le-am învățat de la ei, mii de kilometri pe care i-am străbătut prin toată țara. Sunt alături de colegii mei, care au muncit enorm în această campanie și le transmit că sunt mândru de ceea ce am reușit să facem. Vom continua să luptăm cu toată energia noastră pentru o Românie care se modernizează și se curăță de corupție.

Alianța USR PLUS va continua. Rămânem acea forță politică în care oamenii își pun speranțele pentru schimbarea adevărată a României. Continuăm împreună și nu ne vom da bătăuși.

17K 3.2K Comments 539 Shares



## Mircea Diaconu

Diaconu also used his official FB account to try and mobilize voters; five of his posts contain this narrative. His most engaging post, a video, received 6,999 interactions, 4,160 likes, 1,288 shares, and 829 comments.

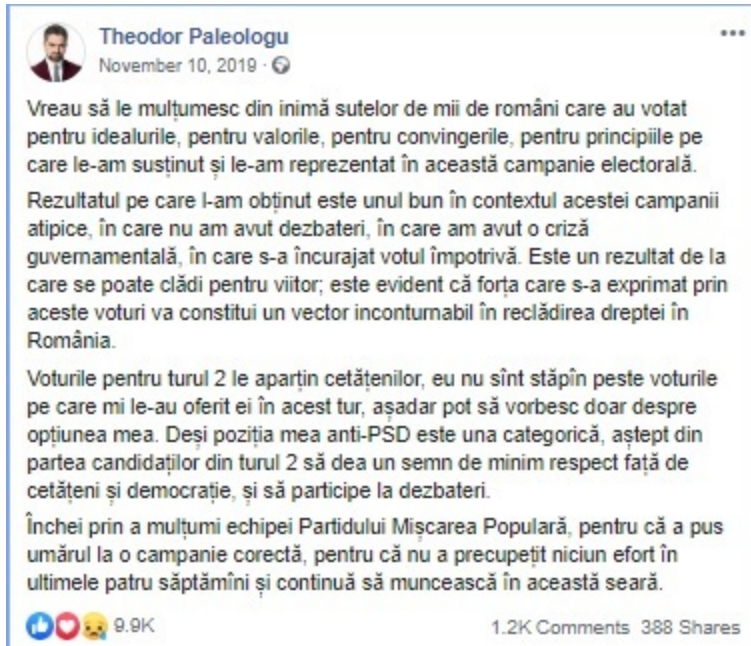




## Theodor Paleologu

Paleologu posted most of his posts (10) on the lack of a proper electoral debate among the presidential candidates. He also posted 8 times to mobilise voters to the polls.

His most engaging post, all text, gathered 11,031 interactions, 8,479 likes, 387 shares and 853 comments.





## Ramona Ioana de Bruynseels

The candidate posted most of her messages in the attempts to mobilize voters - 7 posts - and mentioned 4 times traditional values. Her most engaging post was on the topic of family and traditional values and gathered a staggering 100,208 interactions, 91,950 likes, 2,032 shares, and 1,628 comments during the monitored period.







Catalin Ivan ✓  
@catalin.ivan.14

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TE-AI SĂTURAT DE  
**JOCUL**  
LOR **POLITIC** ?

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## Catalin Ivan

Ivan also used his Facebook account to mobilize voters to go to the polls and he posted 11 times on this topic. His most engaging post was, however, on family and traditional values and gained 335 interactions, 283 likes, 14 shares, and 17 comments.



Catalin Ivan  
November 13, 2019 · 🌐

Am copilărit într-un cartier muncitoresc din Brăila, ca fiu de ofițer de marină militară. Locuiam într-un bloc cu șase scări, din care două scări erau ocupate de militari și familiile lor. Chiar la ieșirea din oraș era o unitate militară. Tata a fost pentru o perioadă și comandantul acestei unități. Am avut o copilărie foarte fericită. Făceam câte o echipă de fotbal cu copiii de la fiecare scară, atât de mulți eram! Era permanent o joacă, o veselie, o prietenie pe care nu le-am mai regăsit după.

Nu vreau să credeți că sunt nostalgic după comunism, dar chiar am avut o copilărie frumoasă. Stăteam la etajul patru, ultimul, iar balconul era către bulevardul de ieșire din oraș. Prin fața blocului treceau permanent soldații care mergeau la instrucție. Pe atunci exista serviciu militar obligatoriu pentru băieți. Eram fascinat de cântecele pe care le cântau trecând spre instrucție. Preferatul meu era: „Treceți, batalioane române, Carpații!”.

Eu așa am copilărit. Am crescut cu spiritul acesta de dragoste de țară, de responsabilitate față de țară, având un tată care lipsea mult de acasă, pentru că avea de îndeplinit tot felul de misiuni și responsabilități.





## Kelemen Hunor

Kelemen's favourite topic on Facebook was the state of the environment, 11 posts, especially because he addressed mostly the Hungarian speaking community which lives in a mountainous area (Harghita, Covasna and Mures counties), in Transylvania, where deforestation is rampant.

His most engaging posts garnered 2,138 interactions, 746 likes, 240 shares and 947 comments during the monitored period.

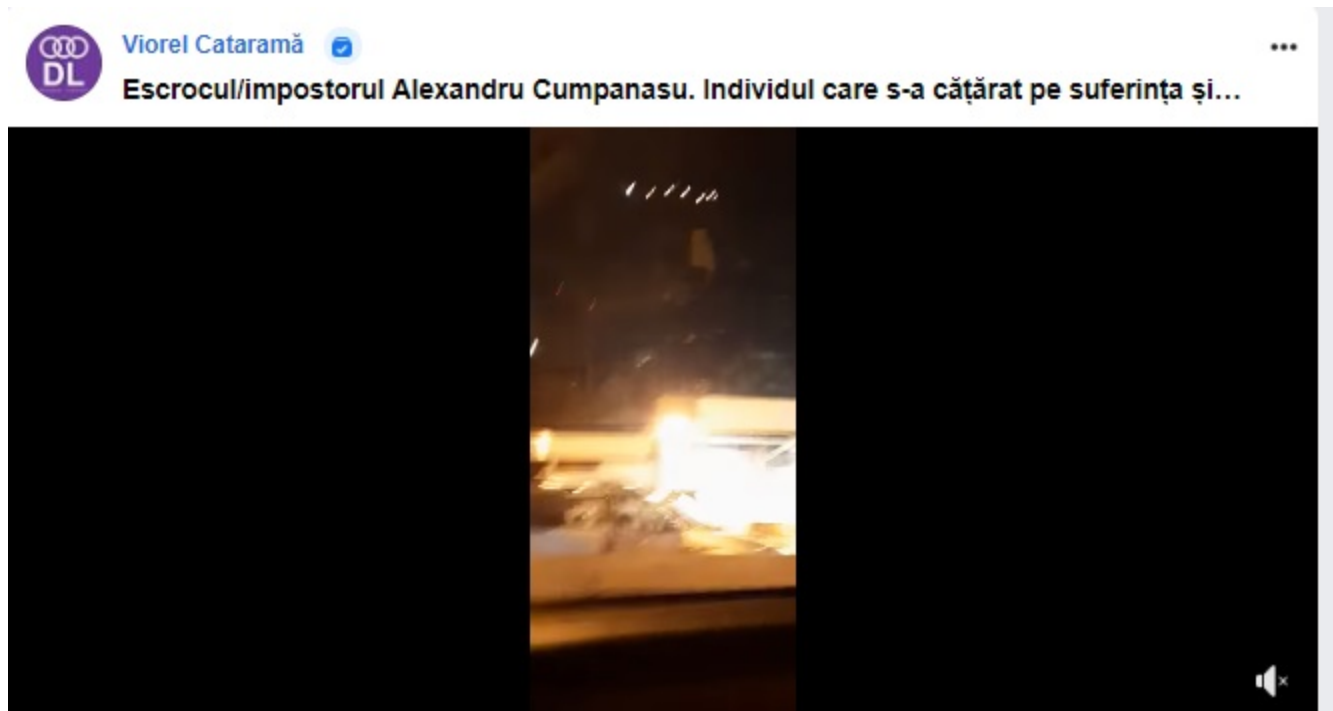




## Viorel Catarama

He did not have a favourite topic, he posted once on several narratives, and two times he uploaded posts on social issues such as social welfare and social benefits.

His most engaging post, a native video attacking fellow candidate Alexandru Cumanasu, had 1,073 interactions, 141 likes, 550 shares, 281 comments.

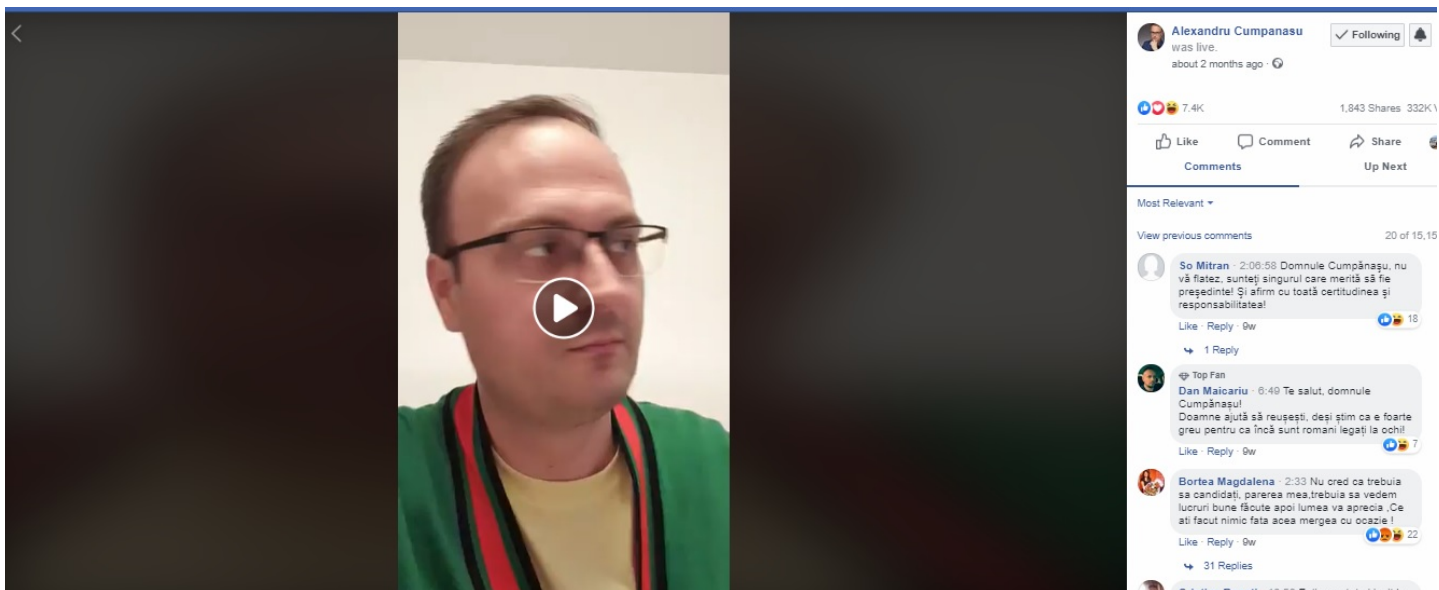




## Alexandru Cumanasu

Cumanasu used his account mostly to mobilize voters (9 posts). He also tried to discredit opponents in 8 posts.

His most engaging post, a live video, garnered 25,297 interactions, 25,297 likes, 2,077 shares and 15,783 comments.





Pagina Bogdan Stanoevici  
@paginabogdanstanoevici

Home  
About

Liked Following Share ...

Send Message

## Bogdan Stanoevici

Stanoevici posted twice about national and traditional values, also twice about the poor state of the education system in Romania, two posts to warn about possible manipulation of the election. He also uploaded two posts to discredit opponents and another two on the democratic state and institution under threat.

His most engaging post, his profile picture (!), got 1,328 interactions, 1,190 likes, 8 shares and 31 comments.



Pagina Bogdan Stanoevici updated their profile picture.  
November 18, 2019



## John Ion Banu

Banu only posted 11 times on his official page during the monitored period, and he addressed national values, the crisis of democracy in general, international relations, the justice reforms and forming of the new government.

His most engaging post garnered 90 interactions, 32 likes, 42 shares and 11 comments.

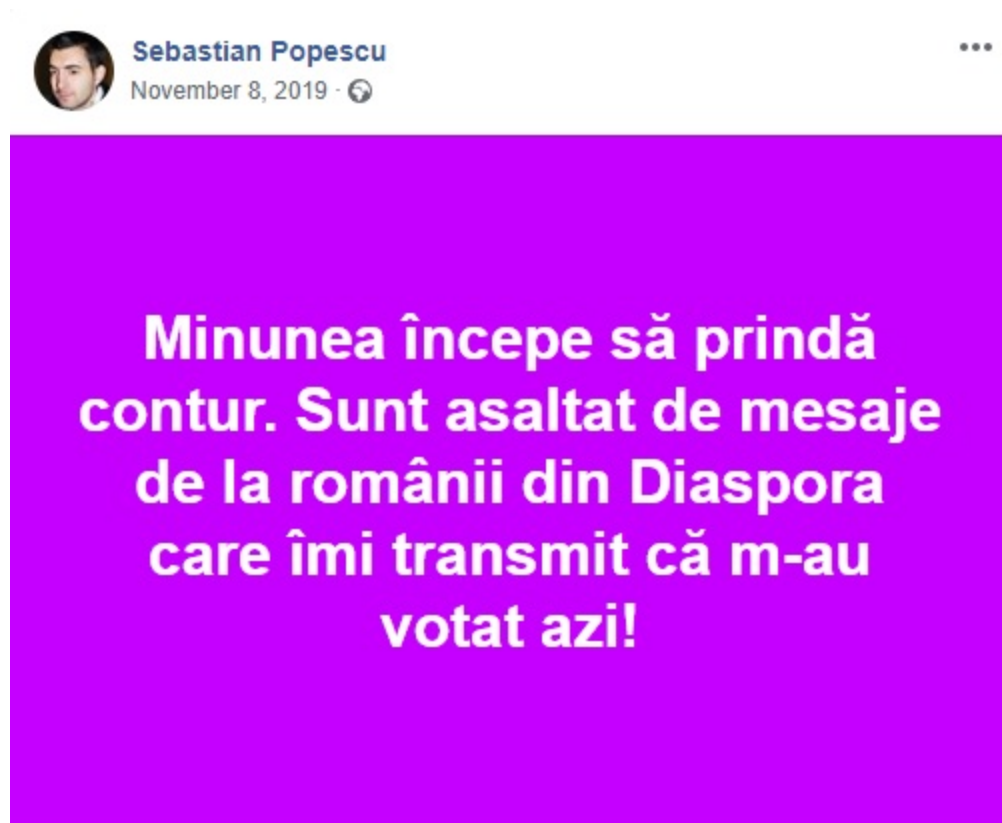




## Sebastian Constantin Popescu

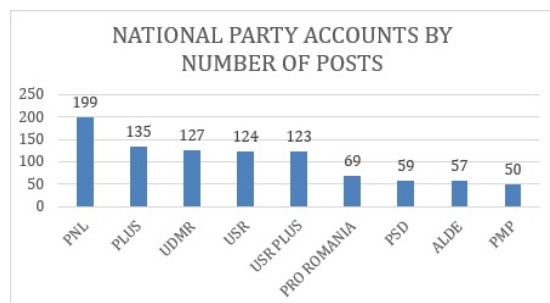
Popescu uploaded 12 posts during the monitored period, out of which 3 were calls to mobilise voters to the polls and 2 were to thank his electorate after the first round.

His most engaging post got 163 interactions, 96 likes, 29 shares and 18 comments.



## V.2 Political party accounts

We monitored 49 political party accounts, both administered by central/national offices and local county branches in some of the most important administrative centres in Romania. In total, we analysed 4,235 posts, out of which analysts found that 2,076 (49 percent) were not directly or indirectly related to the presidential election.

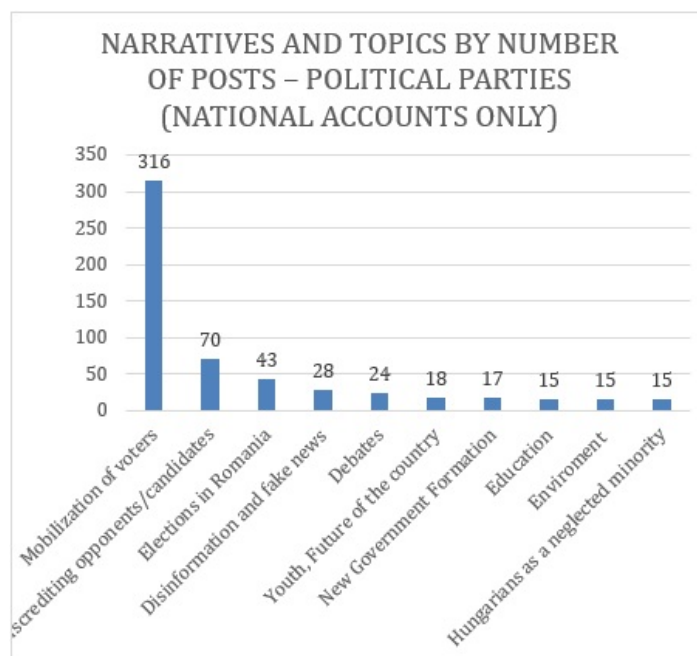


The most active political party during the presidential campaign was the National Liberal Party (PNL), which supported Klaus Iohannis.

The PNL account posted 199 times on election during the monitored period, from 1-24 November. PLUS (which supported Iohannis in the second round) followed with 135 posts related to the presidential election.

The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR/RMDSZ) was also very active, with 135 posts, most of which were in Hungarian language.

Save Romania Union came fourth, with 124 posts, while the separate account dedicated to the alliance between USR and PLUS, came 5<sup>th</sup> with 123 posts.

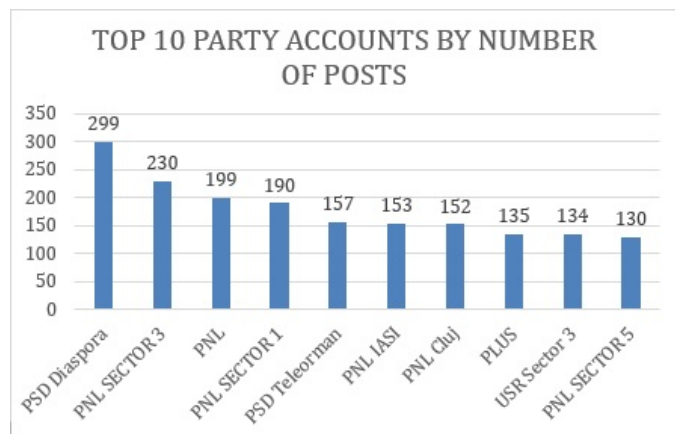


Other parties, including the large Social Democratic Party (PSD), but also its former government ally ALDE and the smaller Pro-Romania and Popular Movement Party, despite having their own candidates in the presidential race, paid much less attention to social media campaigning, as the above chart shows.



# Monitoring Facebook. Presidential Elections – Romania, November 2019

Much like the accounts of the candidates, political parties at the national level preferred to use their Facebook accounts to mobilize voters to the polls. No less than 316 posts across all the national political party accounts were dedicated to calling on voters to go to the polls.



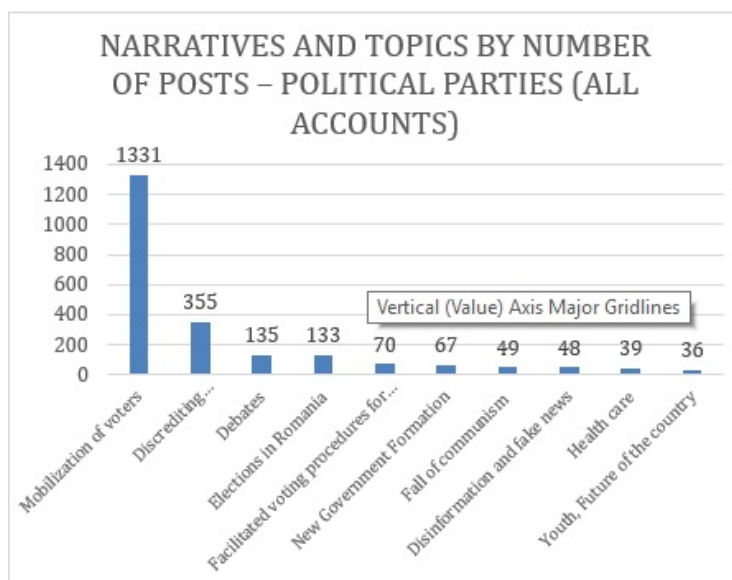
Much less attention was given to discrediting opponents of their candidates and to the organization of the elections in general - 70, respectively 43 posts.

The fourth most discussed topic was the disinformation and fake news, mostly in the form of accusations directed at rival parties who were accused of lying to the public: 28 posts.

When we included the accounts of party branches, the situation was radically different. The Social Democrat Party account dedicated to the diaspora was by far the most active among the political parties, with 299

posts (approx. 12 posts/day) dedicated to the election during the monitored period.

The National Liberal Party's Bucharest Sector 3 branch follows, with 230 posts related to the presidential elections, while the National Liberal Party account comes only third, followed by its Bucharest Sector 1 branch, with 190 posts.



Across 49 political party accounts we have monitored, the preferred topic of posts was again the mobilization of voters, with as many as 1,331 posts. Far less posts were dedicated to discrediting the candidates of the rival political factions and even less, 135, to the lack of a proper political debate among candidates.

The post with the most engagement across political party accounts was a message and a picture of Klaus Iohannis by the National Liberal Party (the central account) to thank voters for supporting him during the first round.

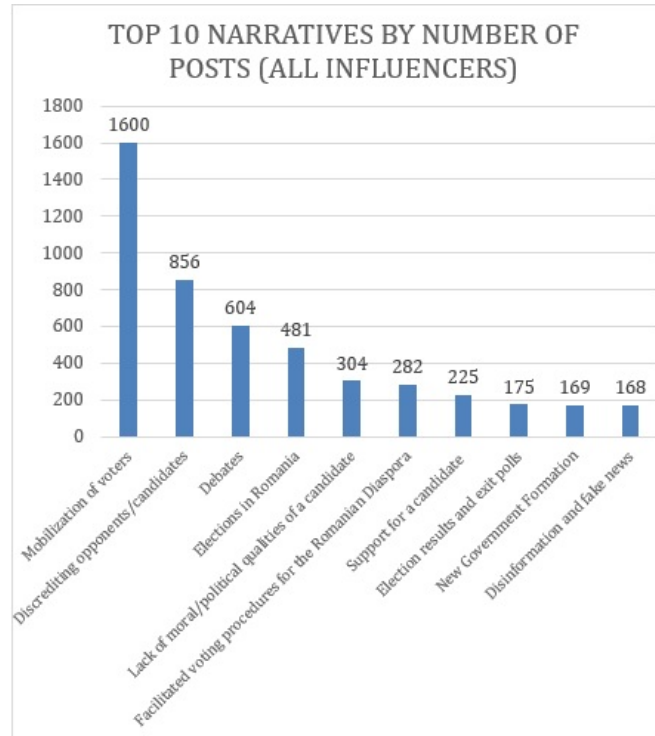


It gathered 49,927 interactions, 37,944 likes, 37,944 shares, and 3,944 comments.

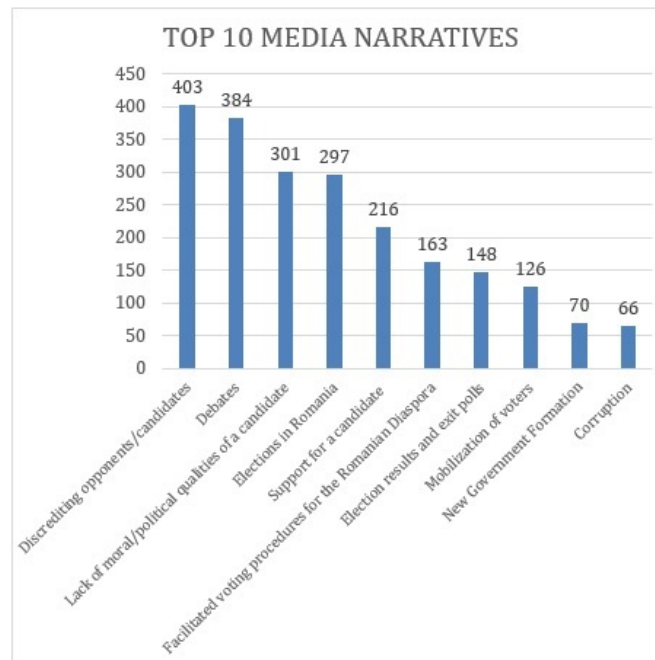
## V.3 Influencers and traditional media

We monitored 20 influencer accounts, including journalists, civic activists, as well as some politicians and 19 traditional media accounts that actively use Facebook to promote articles.

In both cases, the focus of the posts differs from the political parties and candidates' accounts. Influencers and media focused more on candidates, on covering their background and capacities.



However, if influencers focused mostly on calling on voters to exercise their right to vote and less on discrediting candidates based on their background and the lack of qualifications, the media outlets primarily focused on information that discredited candidates, on their lack of moral or professional qualities necessary for the president's post, and also on the lack of political debates among candidates.



## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Facebook, as the main social media network for campaigning in Romania, was used intensively during the presidential electoral campaign. But Facebook candidate pages remained a platform for candidates and political parties to send out messages, advertise the candidates' agendas and mobilise voters; that is why monitoring social media accounts of traditional media and influencers come as control variables in terms of narratives circulating during the electoral campaign, because, as in the case of disinformation and misinformation, they can reflect content that cannot be monitored otherwise, such as private accounts or statements made outside social media.

As far as the topics of disinformation and misinformation are concerned, candidates and political party accounts used the narrative 52 times, while media and influencers referred to it in their posts 232 times during the monitored period. Therefore, the topic was of much more interest to the traditional media and the public opinion in general, than it was to politicians and political parties.

By looking at the content of the posts, we could detect a difference between the candidates' discourse on social media, where it was controlled by a communication team (*as seen in Annex II*), and the statements made by candidates for media outlets or in public events covered by media outlets and subsequently posted on FB.

If in the first case the discourse is one-sided, allowing the candidates to avoid questions and use social media to call on people to vote for them and discredit opponents, in public events covered by the media, journalists focused on the exchange of discrediting accusations between candidates, on background investigations.

Despite the absence of hate speech/ ill-intended speech on most official accounts of political parties and candidates, narratives related to discreditation of opponents have been used and were present in the media; the use of some insults, including the case of the xenophobic remarks targeting Iohannis mentioned previously in the report, did impact the atmosphere of the elections and further polarised the electorate.

Although hate speech generated by supporters of various candidates and directed at their opponents appeared in public statements and on social media, none of the candidates or their supporting political factions made any public call to curb the phenomenon.

As shown in the report, both candidates who confronted each other in the second round were exposed to a fair amount of malicious comments from various sources, discreditation attempts and even some misogyny in the case of Viorella Dancila.

Although not in the top narratives of the electoral campaign, topics such as the rise of racism and xenophobia (34 posts), equal rights for women or lack of gender equality (19 posts), or anti-German sentiments in relation to Klaus Iohannis' German roots (18 posts) were still present in the electoral campaign and were debated by social media users. Patriotism and national values appeared in 52 posts uploaded by candidates and political parties.

# Annexes

## Annex I. List of narratives and candidate accounts

### Narratives

|    |  |     |   |
|----|--|-----|---|
| 1  | Traditional values (family)                      | 61  | Local government issues                                       |
| 2  | Christian values                                 | 62  | The introduction of new taxes                                 |
| 3  | Reproductive rights                              | 63  | The abolition/reduction of taxes                              |
| 5  | Romania as secular state                         | 65  | Lack of infrastructure  |
| 6  | Gender equality                                  | 66  | Justice reforms   |
| 7  | Nationalism                                      | 67  | Emigration and brain drain from Romania                       |
| 8  | The rise of fascism in Europe                    | 68  | Public safety   |
| 9  | The rise of racism and xenophobia                | 69  | Fall of communism   |
| 10 | The rise of anti-Semitism                        | 70  | Democratic state threatened                                   |
| 11 | Traditional/national values (patriotism)         | 71  | Entrepreneurs as social models                                |
| 12 | The rise of islamophobia                         | 72  | Youth, future of the country                                  |
| 13 | Minimum wage raises                              | 73  | Misuse and poor spending of EU funds                          |
| 14 | Pensions   | 74  | Defence and security  |
| 15 | Child support                                    | 75  | Public administration reform                                  |
| 16 | Social issues                                    | 76  | Cutting wages   |
| 17 | Social programs by the government                | 77  | Poverty reduction   |
| 18 | Rising prices                                    | 78  | Extension of the Cooperation Verification                     |
| 19 | Lack of moral/political qualities of a candidate |     | Mechanism   |
| 20 | Support for a candidate                          | 79  | New government formation                                      |
| 21 | Education  | 80  | Party-switching   |
| 22 | School reform                                    | 81  | The President as an impartial observer                        |
| 23 | Health care                                      | 82  | Hungarians as a neglected minority                            |
| 24 | Rule of law                                      | 83  | Cutting wages/salaries  |
| 25 | The crisis of democracy                          | 84  | The incumbent's lack of communication and public presence     |
| 26 | The crisis of liberalism                         | 85  | Lack of electoral debates                                     |
| 27 | Civil society activities/financing               | 86  | Meritocracy   |
| 28 | Migration as a problem                           | 87  | The Colectiv fire   |
| 29 | International relations                          | 88  | Paedophilia   |
| 30 | Brexit   | 89  | Campaign funding transparency                                 |
| 31 | EU shape in the future                           | 90  | Moldavian government fall                                     |
| 32 | Brussels dictates                                | 91  | Minorities in general   |
| 33 | Romanian-EU relations                            | 92  | Demographic crises  |
| 34 | Anti-EU rhetoric                                 | 93  | Alexandra Măceşanu murder                                     |
| 35 | Anti-German sentiments                           | 94  | Facilitated voting procedures for the Romanian Diaspora       |
| 36 | Romanian-German relations                        | 95  | Romania-Moldova Relations                                     |
| 37 | Romanian-Russian relations                       | 96  | Thanking voters   |
| 38 | Violence during campaigning                      | 97  | Discrediting Alexandru Cumpănaşu                              |
| 39 | US - Romanian relations                          | 98  | Increase of Special pensions                                  |
| 40 | Romanian - Ukraine relations                     | 99  | Private sector as motor of economy                            |
| 41 | War in Ukraine                                   | 100 | Voting against a candidate or a party                         |
| 42 | Corruption                                       | 101 | Animal rights   |
| 43 | Agriculture                                      | 102 | The president as mediator                                     |
| 44 | Environment                                      | 103 | Using public funds for the campaign                           |
| 45 | Climate crisis                                   | 104 | Future local elections  |
| 46 | Energy   | 105 | Thanking the team for the campaign                            |
| 47 | Economy in bad shape                             | 106 | Supporting a candidate for the second round                   |
| 48 | Elections in Romania                             | 107 | Breaking electoral law/Fraud                                  |
| 49 | Elections in Romania will be manipulated         | 108 | Inaccurate opinion polls                                      |
| 50 | Mobilisation of voters                           | 109 | Hungarian identity  |
| 51 | Disinformation and fake news                     | 110 | President's role and constitutional duties                    |
| 52 | Russian hybrid warfare                           | 111 | Anti-corruption protests                                      |
| 53 | Political scandals of the government             | 112 | Election results and exit polls                               |
| 54 | Political scandals of the opposition             | 113 | Clientelism   |
| 55 | Problems with media independence                 | 114 | Disobedience within party                                     |
| 56 | Other political scandals                         | 115 | Fight against corruption                                      |
| 57 | The raise of pensions                            | 116 | Early parliamentary elections                                 |
| 58 | Discrediting opponents/candidates                | 117 | Disrespectful attitudes of opponents towards Viorella Dancila |
| 59 | Parallel state                                   |     |   |
| 60 | LGBT rights                                      |     |   |

## Candidate accounts

### Klaus Iohannis

Type: Public page  
Created: May 29, 2014  
Number of Administrators: 5  
Likes: 1,862,941  
Subscribers: 1,842,060  
Frequency of use: 1.3 posts/day

### Viorica Vasilica Dancila

Type: Public page  
Created: June 5, 2019  
Number of Administrators: 12  
Likes: 94,344  
Subscribers: 101,818  
Frequency of use: 2.08 posts/day

### Dan Barna

Type: Public page  
Created: November 2, 2016  
Number of Administrators: 19  
Likes: 123,833  
Subscribers: 131,148  
Frequency of use: 2.65 posts/day

### Mircea Diaconu

Type: Public page  
Created: March 20, 2014  
Number of Administrators: 5  
Likes: 64,279  
Subscribers: 65,493  
Frequency of use: 1.95 posts/day

### Theodor Paleologu

Type: Public page  
Created: January 15, 2012  
Number of Administrators: 6  
Likes: 95,580  
Subscribers: 98,810  
Frequency of use: 3.5 posts/day

### Kelemen Hunor

Type: Public page  
Created: December 11, 2010  
Number of Administrators: 15  
Likes: 29,683  
Subscribers: 30,676  
Frequency of use: 4.1 posts/day

### Ramona Ioana Bruvneels

Type: Public page  
Created: December 5, 2017  
Number of Administrators: 8  
Likes: 140,817  
Subscribers: 150,186  
Frequency of use: 3.25 posts/day

### Catalin Ivan

Type: Public page  
Created: September 2, 2013  
Number of Administrators: 9  
Likes: 23,745  
Subscribers: 23,839  
Frequency of use: 2.7 posts/day

### Alexandru Cumpanasu

Type: Public page  
Created: November 16, 2015  
Number of Administrators: 7  
Likes: 308,878  
Subscribers: 341,214  
Frequency of use: 4.1 posts/day

### Viorel Catarama

Type: Public page  
Created: July 8, 2014  
Number of Administrators: 3  
Likes: 42,300  
Subscribers: 42,786  
Frequency of use: 0.8 posts/day

### Bogdan Stanoevici

Type: Public page  
Created: April 15, 2014  
Number of Administrators: 3  
Likes: 41,504  
Subscribers: 43,254  
Frequency of use: 1.6 posts/day

### John Ion Banu

Type: Public page  
Created: August 13, 2019  
Number of Administrators: 3  
Likes: 418  
Subscribers: 444  
Frequency of use: 0.7 posts/day

### Ninel Peia

Type: Public page  
Created: August 25, 2019  
Number of Administrators: 3  
Likes: 856  
Subscribers: 899  
Frequency of use: None

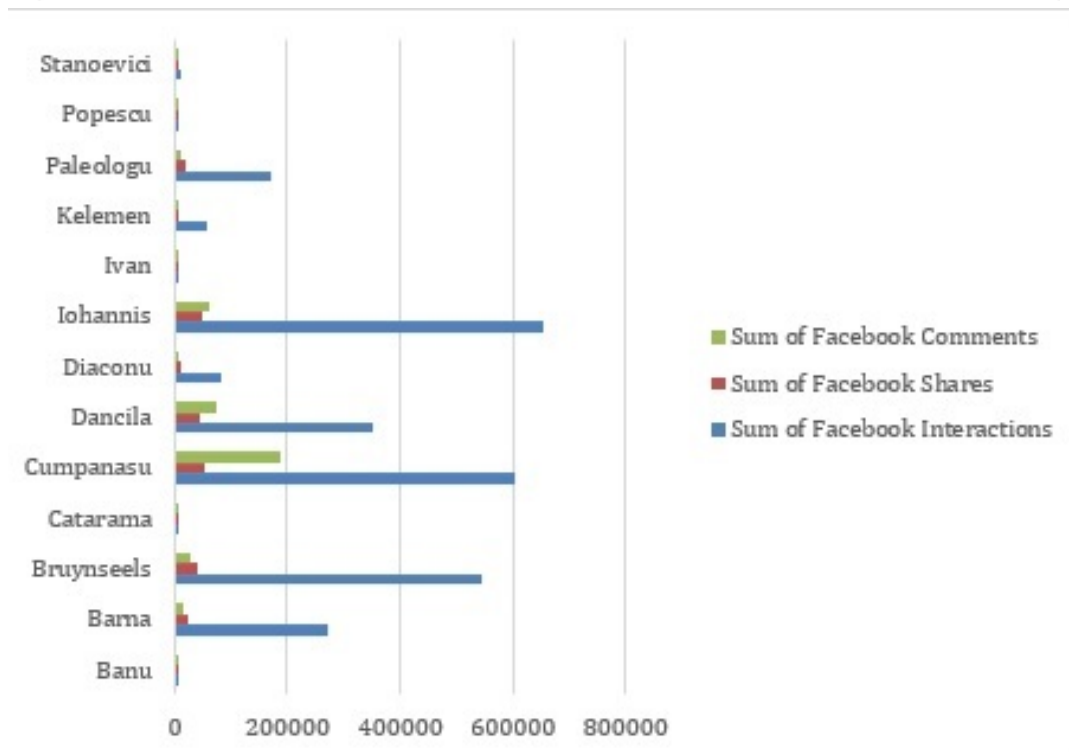
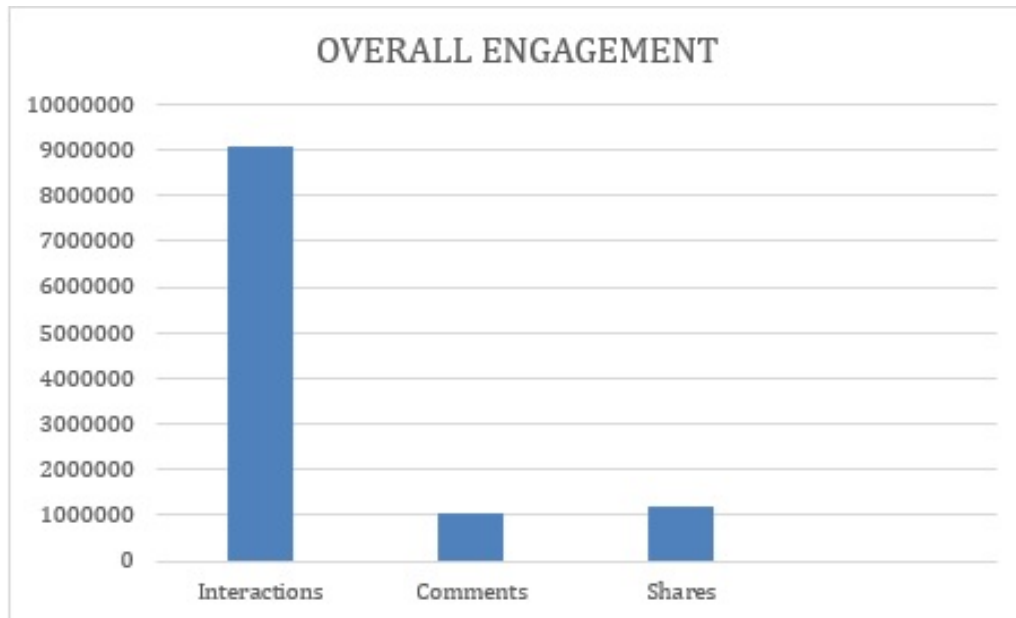
### Sebastian Constantin Popescu

Type: Public page  
Created:  
Number of Administrators: N/A  
Likes: 2,581  
Subscribers: 2,603  
Frequency of use: 0.5 posts/day

## ANNEX II. Social engagement

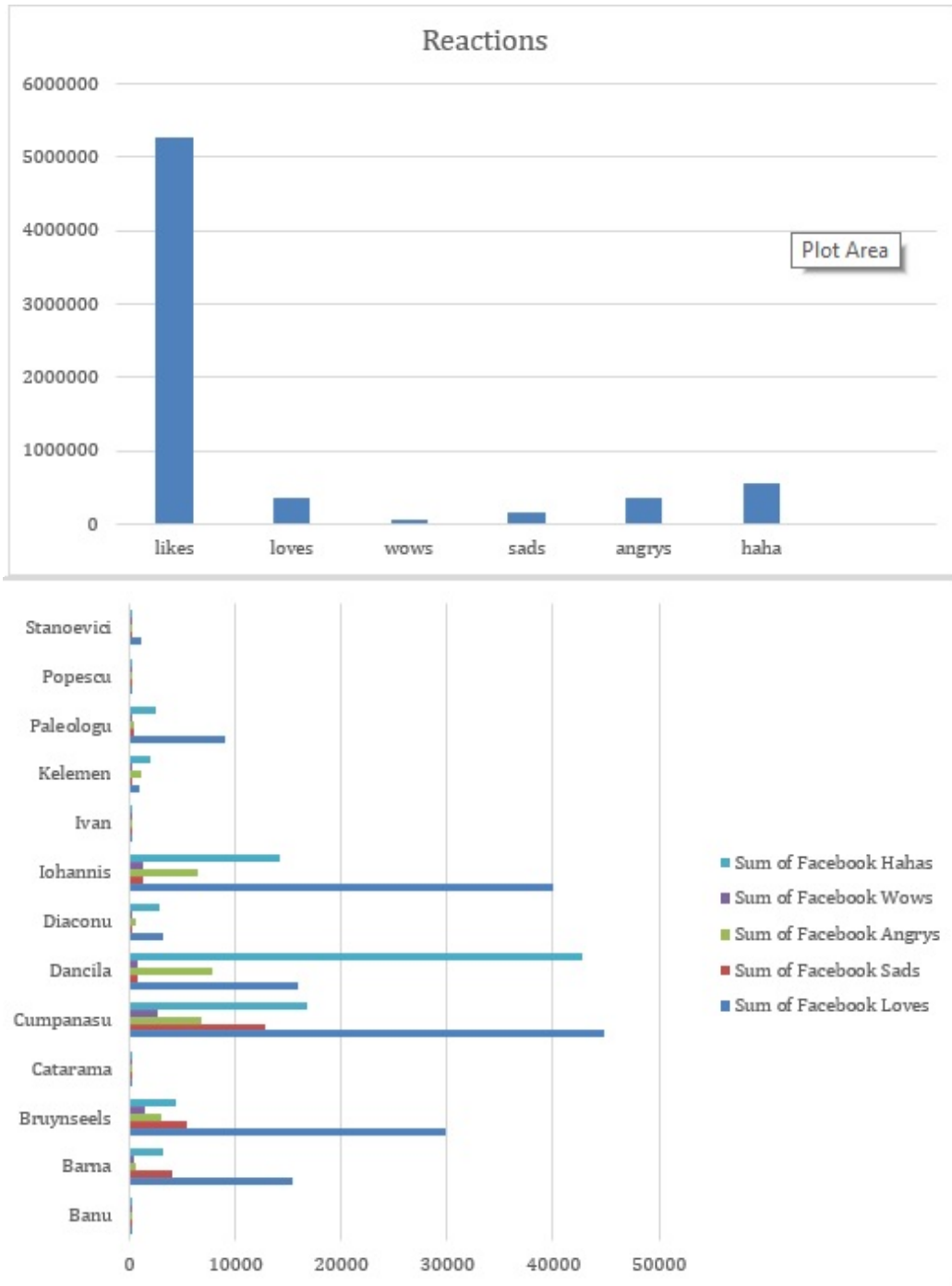
Monitoring period: 1 - 24 November 2019

Summary of social engagement: Sum (comments & shares & interactions):



# Monitoring Facebook. Presidential Elections – Romania, November 2019

Summary of social engagement: Reactions (like, love, ha-ha, wow, sad, angry)





## References:

1. „Monitoring of posts by political parties on Facebook European Parliament Elections 2019“Preliminary Report, MEM098 ↑
2. “Supporting Democracy” is an [EIDHR](#)–funded technical assistance programme working with EU Delegations (EUDs) to strengthen the role of local civil society in advocating and monitoring democratic accountability. ↑
3. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/567401/predicted-social-network-user-penetration-rate-in-romania/> ↑
4. <https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/romania> ↑
5. [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/sondaj-curs-de-unde-isi-iau-romanii-informatiile-politice-topul-televiziunilor-radiourilor-si-site-urilor-de-stiri\\_1267297.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/sondaj-curs-de-unde-isi-iau-romanii-informatiile-politice-topul-televiziunilor-radiourilor-si-site-urilor-de-stiri_1267297.html) ↑
6. <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/nea3xm/clipuri-si-meme-uri-care-te-trimit-la-vot> ↑
7. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/prezenta-la-vot-la-alegerile-europarlamentare-2019-bec-ora-9-00-323-la-europarlamentare-si-270-la-referendumul-pe-justitie-1137648> ↑
8. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/alegeri-prezidentiale-2019/vot-diaspora-alegeri-prezidentiale-2019-turul-doi-romanii-din-strainatate-isi-pot-exprima-dreptul-la-vot-timp-de-trei-zile-1220106> ↑
9. <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/alegeri-prezidentiale-2014/rezultate-finale-in-diaspora-iohannis-votat-de-89-73-dintre-romanii-din-strainatate-ponta-a-castigat-doar-in-palestina.html> ↑
10. <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/social/ministrul-intotero-anunta-noi-date-oficiale-97-milioane-de-romani-traiesc-in-strainatate-1163989> ↑
11. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/ministrul-pentru-diaspora-9-7-milioane-de-romani-traiesc-in-afara-granitelor-tarii-iar-mai-mult-de-jumatate-sunt-in-diaspora/30073056.html> ↑
12. <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/alegeri-prezidentiale-2014/rezultate-finale-in-diaspora-iohannis-votat-de-89-73-dintre-romanii-din-strainatate-ponta-a-castigat-doar-in-palestina.html> ↑
13. [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/sondaj-comandat-de-academia-romana-psd-i-pnl-sunt-la-egalitate-iar-alian-a-usr-plus-genereaza-surpriza\\_1349267.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/sondaj-comandat-de-academia-romana-psd-i-pnl-sunt-la-egalitate-iar-alian-a-usr-plus-genereaza-surpriza_1349267.html) ↑

14. <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/barometrul-de-opinie-al-academiei-rom%C3%A2ne-39-dintre-rom%C3%A2ni-vor-vota-pe-26-mai-psd-%C8%99i-pnl-um%C4%83r-la-um%C4%83r-cu-26-/29937574.html> ↑
15. <https://www.digifm.ro/stiri/viorica-dancila-desemnata-oficial-candidat-al-partidului-la-prezidentiale-47645> ↑
16. [https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/prima-femeie-intrat-cursa-cotroceni-ramona-ioana-bruynseels-candidata-partidului-controlat-voiculescu-1\\_5cfbf922892c0bb0c6236a8a/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/prima-femeie-intrat-cursa-cotroceni-ramona-ioana-bruynseels-candidata-partidului-controlat-voiculescu-1_5cfbf922892c0bb0c6236a8a/index.html) ↑
17. <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/cine-este-alexandru-cumpanasu-candidat-la-alegerile-prezidentiale-277821> ↑
18. The kidnapping of Alexandra Măceșanu happened in **Caracal**, **Olt County**, **Romania**, on 25 July 2019. The Romanian police were heavily criticised for taking 19 hours to locate and search the building where she was held captive. The handling of the case resulted in a widespread outrage and protests, which led to the dismissal of **Interior Minister Nicolae Moga** and other officials. ↑
19. <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/kelemen-hunor-candidat-alegeri-prezidentiale-2780450> ↑
20. <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/ninel-peia-candidat-alegeri-prezidentiale-2782266> ↑
21. <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/viorel-catarama-candidat-la-alegerile-prezidentiale-2779965> ↑
22. <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/campania-electoral-a-inceput-cu-un-val-de-postari-fake-news-lideri-psd-promoveaza-mesaje-false-2802900> ↑
23. <https://www.vice.com/ro/article/evjbjje/live-ul-lui-alexandru-cumpanasu> ↑
24. <https://republica.ro/10-din-campania-electoral-a-non-combat-blat-sau-diversiune> ↑

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