

## Moldovan election: Incumbent Dodon way behind Usatii and Sandu in social media campaign

Moldova's incumbent President Igor Dodon is losing out on social media to his ideological rival Renato Usatii and the pro-European candidate Maia Sandu, who are dominating the online campaign in the lead up to the Presidential election on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

The research, conducted by Mediapoint, a Moldovan new media organization, and MEMO 98, a Slovak non-profit, examined social media in Moldova between 1<sup>st</sup> September and 24<sup>th</sup> October, monitoring the public pages of 37 politicians and parties.

Usatii and Sandu account for over 70% of all the interactions during the period, with an active campaign from Usatii leading the way with close to 570k engagements and Sandu not far behind with 410k, despite posting significantly less. The incumbent Dodon comes in fourth behind Andrei Nastase, with a little over a quarter the figure of Sandu and fifth that of Usatii.

The monitoring shows the battle is focused primarily on Facebook, which saw over 3,700 posts from the pages and 2.7m interactions over the period, compared to only 514 posts and a little over 190,000 interactions on Instagram. Individual candidates' pages were also far more important for the campaign than their official party pages, generating 13.5 times more engagement than the party pages.

Usatii was by far the most active candidate on Facebook, posting twice as much as his nearest rival, while his *Partidul Nostru* party posted 3.5 times more than any other party. Usatii was also the biggest spender on paid promotion on social media, paying out €15k for advertising. The overall spending during the campaign was relatively low, with a little over €40,000 invested by registered candidates and parties from 4<sup>th</sup> August onwards.

While Usatii and his party have been the most prolific, Sandu and the *Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate* have shown similar popularity despite posting far less. Sandu posted just 84 times on Facebook in comparison to Usatii's 273 posts, while her party posted 99 times to Partidul Nostru's 343 posts. But on engagement, *Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate* significantly outperformed Partidul Nostru, generating 86,000 engagements – three times the figure of Partidul Nostru.

In terms of the content of campaigns, candidates and parties focused on roads and infrastructure, reunification with Romania, salaries and pensions, and COVID-19, with the government's handling of the crisis coming under increased scrutiny. Social media users, however, were most engaged on salaries and pensions, education, corruption and bribery, with the problems of the judicial system and pensions generating the most comments.

Remarking on the findings, Andrei Fornea of MediaPoint said: "This is the first time anyone has looked in depth at political campaigning on social media around elections in Moldova, and it is already throwing up some interesting findings. We will have to wait until Sunday to find out if the social media battle reflects the public at large."

The full interim report can be read [here](#). Mediapoint and MEMO 98 will issue a final report covering the full campaign period as well as any second-round run-off following the conclusion of the elections.

## ABOUT

### Media Point

*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.*

### MEMO 98

*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.*