



ELECTION FORENSICS 2025: Romania's repeat of presidential elections

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Executive Summary

Digital electoral campaign strategy: promoting policies or personal attacks?

George Simion adopted an aggressive electoral campaign, attacking elites and the traditional political class, while promoting policies and initiatives to help young people, support entrepreneurs and the diaspora. Crin Antonescu focused his confrontations on Nicușor Dan, George Simion, and Victor Ponta, while promoting the importance of change and modernization in the bureaucratic, energy and economic sectors. Nicușor Dan's ads were built on the tone of a moderate candidate, who relied on coherence, delimitation from populism and appeals to reason. Victor Ponta alternated between an identity discourse and harsh attacks on the political system, seeking to reactivate his nostalgic electorate.

Dominant campaign tone: positive or negative messages?

Nicușor Dan seldom used negative messages initially but increased attacks as the campaign progressed but overall maintained a relatively balanced tone. George Simion adopted an aggressive tone at the beginning of his campaign, with the middle phase shifting to a positive tone, but regressed into an even more significantly negative tone. Crin Antonescu, after a non-aggressive opening period, started to combine negative messages with positive ones and oscillated between positive and negative sentiment. Victor Ponta's campaign was rather restrained, with positive accents and appeals to national identity, but became more negative during the middle period, with fewer attacks towards the end of the campaign.

Party expenditure for digital campaigning and microtargeting

When focusing on the expenditure and digital outreach of candidates' campaigns, the candidate backed by the two main parties, PSD and PNL, benefited from the largest overall budget. However, the largest budget for advertisement across Meta's platforms, and consequently the most ads published, was the independent candidate who won the election. Across all Meta ad campaigns, we find that candidates aimed to reach the broadest audience possible and rarely opted to target specific voter groups based on age, gender, social background and nationality.

1. Introduction

Following the annulment of the 2024 Romanian presidential election result, the 2025 electoral campaign revealed deep cleavages in Romanian society. Although the legitimacy of the new election was constantly and fervently contested, voters living both in Romania and abroad contributed to a staggering turnout in the second round (relative to Romanian standards), willing to give a new political direction to the country. The intense use of social media as an electoral communication tool brought to the forefront ideological fragmentation, polarisation, and intense electoral competition. How candidates promote policy ideas and respond to rival attacks helps shape a clear picture of their communication strategies and the type of relationship they aim to build with the electorate through carefully crafted online messages.

2. Methodology

Based on the first round election results our analysis focuses on the digital campaigns of the top-four placed candidates: George Simion, Nicușor Dan, Crin Antonescu and, Victor Ponta, removing the seven other standing candidates due to their low vote share. Elena Lasconi won under 3 percent of the votes, while the other six won less than 1 percent (Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă 2025).

Table 1. Major candidates in the Romanian Presidential election

Section	Nicușor Dan (independent)	George Simion (AUR)	Victor Ponta (independent)	Crin Antonescu (PSD,PNL,UDMR)
1	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: [Permanent Electoral Authority](#), last accessed June 2025

Disinformation Narratives

Based on information provided by the Meta Ad Library, we analysed adverts that were active during the official electoral campaign, performing a quantitative analysis to examine instances of mis-, dis- and mal-information. This approach was adopted for two reasons. First, an individual Meta advert can be reused and further promoted by altering the targeting criteria and sums of money spent on advertising. Second, some ads contained both multiple and different instances of mis-, dis- and mal-information. We therefore identified the number of instances where a form of false and/or misleading information was spread, rather than to simply count the number of problematic ads.

In the case of Nicușor Dan and George Simion, a larger dataset was used to examine their adverts due to the candidates entering the second round of the election, thus having two additional campaign weeks.

Content and Sentiment analysis

The period analysed was between 04.04.2025 and 04.05.2025 for candidates Victor Ponta (independent candidate) and Crin Antonescu (candidate supported by PSD, PNL and UDMR), as they placed 4th and 3rd after the first ballot. Respectively, 04.04.2024 and 18.05.2025 for George Simion (AUR candidate) and Nicușor Dan (independent candidate) because these two candidates placed first and second, following the second presidential election between the two. The contents of the online postings (text, video, image) were analysed, emphasizing the messages conveyed. The extracted posts were examined and manually either as „positive or negative” based on their content. Posts labelled negative took the form of accusations, insults, direct or indirect confrontations, attacks, or messages that fuelled an already existing conflict. Messages marked positive comprised public policy proposals, plans for the future, concrete solutions or calls for unity. Through this mechanism, we examined the kind of online communication strategy each candidate pursued, and to understand candidates' plans, whether they are basing their campaign on a real desire for change or just fuelling conflicts.

Financial campaign expenditure and targeting metrics

Two financial datasets were used to investigate candidates' campaign spending. In addition to campaign expenditure, we also examined the ad post frequency, impressions and target metrics. We first extracted candidate's financial reports published on the Permanent Electoral Authority website (AEP). We also used the Meta Ad Library to download all adverts published by the main candidates, applying the following filters: a start and end date of 4 April to 17 May, (2) all platforms (Facebook and Instagram) (3) all inactive ads. All the other filters remained set to default. All candidates had a varying number of ads launched in the pre-campaign period, which we mention but are not included in the graphs. The data was then organized in Excel and analysed.

3. Disinformation narratives in the 2024 Romanian national elections

In this section we analyse the frequency of misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, as defined by UNESCO (2018), in the electoral messages promoted by the main presidential candidates across Meta platform ads.

Results

As shown in Table 2, the number of ads varies substantially across candidates, with the two second-round candidates at opposite extremes: George Simion, with a total of 99 ads, and Nicușor Dan, with 900 ads. In terms of the relative proportion of false and/or harmful messages identified, Simion is the clear outlier, with an extremely high percentage of mis-, dis- and mal-information narratives in his political communications. Compared to his competitors, Simion heavily promoted

messages containing disinformation, amounting to almost a third of his entire number of Meta ads. In the case of the other three candidates, instances of mis-, dis- and mal-information were extremely rare, thus having negligible percentages; although Nicușor Dan promoted slightly more problematic content than Ponta and Antonescu, his percentage is the lowest due to his extensive digital electoral campaign of 900 sponsored ads.

Table 2. Disinformation, misinformation and malinformation across presidential candidates.

Candidate	Total ads collected (N)	Misinformation (N)	Disinformation (N)	Malinformation (N)	Total (N)	Total mis/dis/mal (%)
Nicușor Dan	900	0	13	3	16	1.78%
George Simion	99	1	30	4	35	35.35%
Crin Antonescu	240	0	1	4	5	2.08%
Victor Ponta	160	0	5	1	6	3.75%

Source: Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

Another important finding is related to the discrepancy between the frequency of each concept. Except for a mistake made by Simion regarding the number of social housing facilities built in Cluj-Napoca during Emil Boc’s mayor mandates (Meta Ad Library 2025c), misinformation is almost entirely absent. In other words, instances of identified false information are routinely used to attack or discussed in a negative tone. And although present for each candidate, malinformation is also mostly absent, with only 12 instances identified from a total of almost 1400 words. Disinformation, on the other hand, was the most prevalent and employed differently by each candidate.

We provide some examples of dis- and mal- information from each candidate to illustrate their content and form. Simion had the most messages containing disinformation, more than the other candidates combined, interweaving false and fear-inducing narratives. For example, following the cancelled 2024 election and Calin Georgescu banned from running again for president, Simion claimed that a dangerous social experiment was unfolding in Romania, supported by the EU elite in Brussels and other major European capitals (Meta Ad Library 2025d). This is a dangerous and unproven statement likely made to spread fear and mistrust, and ultimately to manipulate the electorate. Nicușor Dan, who managed to win the presidential election after a close race with Simion, also had several messages containing disinformation – albeit a small proportion compared to his total number of adverts. For example, when discussing the importance of doctors and health services in rural and remote areas, he falsely claimed that the Romanian government said no funds were available for the healthcare system (Meta Ad Library 2025e), thus intentionally promoting a distorted image about the state of the healthcare system and putting himself in a favourable contrast

with the governing coalition. Victor Ponta had fewer deceiving Meta ads, with one instance of malinformation and five containing disinformation. For example, he stated that, as president, he would prevent all current political cases, including Georgescu's trial (Meta Ad Library 2025f). Aside from no evidence of any current political cases and trials in Romania, Ponta (with a background as a former prosecutor and prime minister) should be aware that the president does not have the constitutional powers to interfere with the justice system, thus intentionally misleading the electorate. Crin Antonescu was the only candidate who had more messages containing malinformation than disinformation, with the latter present only once when falsely accusing Ponta of being a thief and national traitor (Meta Ad Library 2025a). In the case of malinformation, a notable example was Antonescu's claim that Simion paid 1.5 million dollars to an American lobby company to denigrate the Romanian state (Meta Ad Library 2025b). The information about the electoral promoting contract made by Simion with that American company was taken out of context, however, placing Simion in a bad position and misleading the public, since Simion had not paid that sum in order to promote a denigrating campaign towards Romania.

4. A content and sentiment analysis of Romania's national elections

This section focuses on the nature of messages and political discourse that were promoted by the presidential candidates. In order to have a thorough understanding of the communication strategies that were adopted, we conducted a sentiment analysis, based on the messages present in the candidates' digital electoral campaign.

Dominant Themes and Communication Strategies

Nicușor Dan opted for a sustained digital campaign with a constant online presence. His positive messages adopted a pragmatic tone, largely without exaggeration or idealistic promises, instead conveying an image of balance and responsibility. From the start of the campaign, the positive messages were intended to mobilize the electorate and convey that there was a real alternative for Romania. In a post addressed to voters, Dan employed a concise and direct call to participation, emphasizing the idea that citizens deserved better representation and encouraging electoral turnout. The message reflects a communicative style based on respect for the audience and pragmatic mobilization. In another message, he says: "[I said it and I say it again: no pensions will be cut. It's not just a political commitment, it's a moral duty to our parents and grandparents](#)", a message emphasising fairness and personal commitment. Themes covered in the positive messages include economic stability, social security, fighting poverty, and ensuring equal rights. Unlike other candidates, Dan does not use strong emotional language but relies on clarity, moderation, and logic, a style of communication designed to appeal to an urban-based electorate. By contrast, Dan's negative messages were more direct, but kept the same note of decency and argumentation. They are not aggressive or loaded with personal attacks, but clear interventions against extremist discourse, corruption, or perceived political dangers. One of the most visible messages is against George Simion, where he says: "[The way a man, let alone a politician, talks about women says all](#)

[we need to know about him](#)". This type of message is not intended to discredit, but to draw attention to the danger that such discourse can pose to society. Dan's negative campaign was mainly focused on distancing himself from candidates promoting populism and conspiracy theories. He criticized his opponents' lack of workable solutions and stressed the importance of stability, the rule of law, and democratic balance. His negative messages generally served to draw clear lines between him and the other candidates without turning the campaign into a personal conflict. Overall, his negative messages are calculated and strategically used. He does not attack unnecessarily, but neither does he avoid taking a stand against real threats to democratic values. Just as in his positive messages, he conveys poise and seriousness; in his negative messages, he continues to maintain a calm but firm voice.

George Simion, candidate for the political party Alliance for the Unification of Romanians, promoted changes toward specific segments of Romanian society. On several occasions, Simion conveyed a sense of concern for the future of young people in Romania. Much of his presidential campaign focused on offering long-term solutions to ensure a better livelihood and a more secure future for the younger generation. Simion proposed to implement real change to combat the illicit drugs phenomenon, through different methods such as counselling, creating recovery centres and educating young people to be aware of the risks. Another important point of his campaign, also related to the youth, was the need for modern and fair education. He wants to impose changes, to the current teaching method and also initiated a pact related to education with ANOSR (National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania). Housing for young people was another focus increasing the number of ANL (National Agency for Housing) housing, he wants to provide decent housing at decent prices He has launched a national pact entitled "[Respect for Romanian entrepreneurs](#)", through which he wants to change the bureaucratic system, taxation, controls, and major taxes that make it difficult for Romanian entrepreneurs to do business. He also mentions energy policies, where he wants to re-industrialize energy so that all citizens can have stable, cheap, and sovereign energy, and also wants the soil to be re-industrialized to have a sustainable soil. Simion wants farmers to receive economic support, lower rates when it comes to agricultural loans, and he wants agriculture in Romania to be a strong new sector.

Simion`s campaign has proven that he does not shy away from making his opinions heard and maintains an aggressive stance toward his rivals and other political actors. He accused rival Nicușor Dan (the current President of Romania), of allegedly planning to commit voter fraud with other influential people, such as Traian Băsescu (President of Romania 2004-2014). He also makes some comparisons between Klaus Iohannis (President of Romania 2014-2024) and Nicușor Dan, stating that Nicușor Dan will continue this regime of Iohannis that has destroyed the nation. He calls Nicușor Dan and his supporters in the political sphere "[criminals in public office](#)". He accuses the Republic of Moldova that they too would try to rig the elections so that Nicușor Dan would win. He calls the CCR (Romania's Constitutional Court) robbers who have mocked Romania, attacked democracy under the pretext that there was foreign interference related to Călin Georgescu's candidacy in 2024. He also accused the Brussels bureaucrats of needlessly interfering

in the Romanian elections. He also calls Emmanuel Macron (President of France) and Antony Blinken (former US Secretary of State) robbers, people who want war. He strongly criticizes the bureaucrats in the European Union, calling them neo-Marxists who, through their Green Deal, are manifesting a new form of communism.

Crin Antonescu discussed a variety of policy proposals desire for real change and modernisation. During his campaign, energy policies were mentioned several times. He advocates energy security, wanting to ensure that optimal production minimizes energy dependency from other states. He aspires to ensure cheap energy for Romanians and supports the completion of hydroelectric power plants, which are currently blocked. Antonescu also discussed Romanian entrepreneurs and businesses promoting a national pact for Romanian entrepreneurs to ensure their recognition by the state. He has another plan to support young people dealing with drug addiction and to rehabilitate them, to give them a second chance. He believes that the state should support these young people by implementing more effective counselling programs. However, he also wants to make changes in the sentencing of traffickers, and proposes that efforts should be stepped up to ensure that the law is applied firmly and fairly. He is also proposing changes for the diaspora; his plan, his policies related to Romanians living abroad revolve around the idea of restoring their dignity and security. He wants to make changes in the justice system, in education, and in the field of labour so that these citizens have real reasons to return home. Another interesting plan he mentioned is the idea of creating a modern state, where the state would work directly for the citizens. He wants to initiate a national platform to make the state more efficient through a mechanism of permanent evaluation of the work of central institutions. To ensure transparency, he wants regular reports to be made public for everyone to observe and understand more deeply which institutions are inefficient in order to abolish/eliminate them and eliminate bureaucracy. Other policies mentioned by Crin Antonescu during his campaign also include ideas such as minority rights, changes with the percentage of women and young people in leadership positions, increasing the retirement age for magistrates from 48 to 65, and changes to special pensions for magistrates.

Antonescu`s campaign, supported by the PSD, PNL, and UDMR, used several negative posts to criticise and attack rivals. Most negative posts were directed towards George Simion, strongly criticising Simion`s absence from the presidential debates and he labelled him a coward, and his campaign focused exclusively on creating chaos without having a real policy program for Romania. He believes that Simion is not fighting for the country; he is a fake patriot who invests money in his own ["cult of nationalism and in notorious conspirators from outside the country"](#). He accuses Simion of Moscow-funded ties, a covert SIE officer, Antonescu clearly emphasises that Simion is not qualified to be president due to his lack of program and unwillingness to engage in debates. Nicușor Dan is the next most frequently mentioned candidate, criticising the way his rival ran Bucharest during his term as mayor He draws a comparison between Klaus Iohannis and Nicușor Dan, arguing that they possessed very similar personalities who lack the innovation to improve Romania. He also accused Dan of indifference and ignorance towards a specific case about cancer patients, because he did not sign several documents for two years, and in the first

days of his campaign, he signed these documents to be seen more positively. Lastly, he made indirect mentions to Victor Ponta, whom he considers a traitor, for betraying him, Mircea Geoană, the party he was part of (PSD), and all those who were close to him and supported him in his political career. He judges him for his time as prime minister when he turned the tide against Romanians, causing massive floods in some villages on Romania's border with Serbia.

Victor Ponta's campaign was characterized by a carefully constructed populist rhetoric built around themes already familiar to the supporters: patriotism, social solidarity, and appeals to historical memory and collective national identity. Although the campaign overall lacked positivity, they were intended to shape an image of a leader close to the people, who recognised the country's needs. One of the simplest and clearest messages was: "[Ponta and Romanians!](#)", a short but symbolically charged phrase, intended to create the impression of mutual belonging. In another message, the former prime minister appealed to the collective memory and sense of continuity: "[For 2000 years, our people have fought for freedom and dignity. Now it is our turn](#)". Such statements were common in the leader's campaign, who banked on identity and tradition to rekindle faith in national values. But positive messages are not just symbolic evocations. In some posts, Ponta promised measures to support agriculture, protect pensioners, and stop imports that hurt local producers. He positioned himself as a politician who understood ordinary citizens' grievances and promised to restore their dignity. Taken together, these messages were constructed to reaffirm the connection with a segment of voters feeling disconnected with the current parties, but who continue to look for a familiar and predictable leader. The negative side of Victor Ponta's campaign was significantly more present and intense. The general tone was belligerent and built on the idea that the current political system was deeply corrupt, manipulative and dangerous for democracy. A relevant message is "[Here is the evidence! They lied to you again!](#)", where the message leaves no room for interpretation: political opponents are directly accused of lying and manipulating public opinion. In another post, Ponta insists on the idea of injustice in the justice system: "[When the statute of limitations runs out, the thieves get away and Romanians suffer!](#)", bringing to the fore the issue of double standards, a protected, privileged elite. During the campaign, the negative tone intensified. Ponta accused various political and media structures of exerting undue influence and openly criticized the other candidates, especially those backed by major parties, whom he suggested were part of a political game designed to fool voters. Moreover, several posts suggested that the electoral battle was unfair and that the forces behind the elections tried to impose a "puppet" of the system. His digital campaign seems to have been designed as a call for anger and outrage. The negative communication strategy focused on reinforcing an image of the candidate as an outsider challenging established political structures, while presenting himself as an alternative to actors associated with practices perceived by segments of the electorate as corrupt. Ponta went beyond criticism, presenting himself as actively opposing political actors portrayed as having betrayed public trust; this confrontational stance became a recurring feature of his campaign discourse.

Table 3. Examples of positive and negative messages across presidential candidates

PRESIDENCIAL CANDIDATE	POSITIVE MESSAGES	NEGATIVE MESSAGES
Nicușor Dan (Independent)	We have capable people , a valuable diaspora, natural resources, energy and creativity. As President, I believe my role is to bring these forces together and build, step by step, a Romania that knows where it is going.	A leader is not allowed to speak about hatred. Even less so about our brothers from the Republic of Moldova. Romania needs unity, not contempt.
George Simion (AUR)	I call on all entrepreneurs, whether they are just starting or have kept their businesses in spite of injustices, to join the national pact "Respect for Romanian entrepreneurs!" that I have launched.	Romanian, don't be afraid. They told you that if you choose otherwise, chaos will follow. But the truth is that the fear belongs to them - those who can no longer control your vote.
Crin Antonescu (PSD.PNL,UDMR)	Energy security means having robust production capacities. The solution is to move from the Green Deal to the Smart Deal. Romania, forward!	"Patriot" Simion does not use this money here, in the country, to inform Romanians, on their money, what "great" program he has for the country. That's because he doesn't have a serious program. Romania does not need imposture and a fairground show.
Victor Ponta (Independent)	I will block imports of agri-food products from Ukraine! These imports have bankrupted Romanian farmers and agricultural workers!	The system is again trying to impose its puppet. Lasconi is out, Antonescu will be out. All for Nicușor Dan. I won't give in. And the Romanians won't accept being robbed either.

Source: Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

Sentiment analysis of parties across the election

Nicușor Dan had one of the longest and most intense campaigns in terms of online communication. The period between April 4 and May 18, 2025, was marked by a high volume of daily messages, a significant part of which were negative, especially in the second part of the campaign. In the beginning, negative messages were rare. The discourse was focused on proposals, projects, and

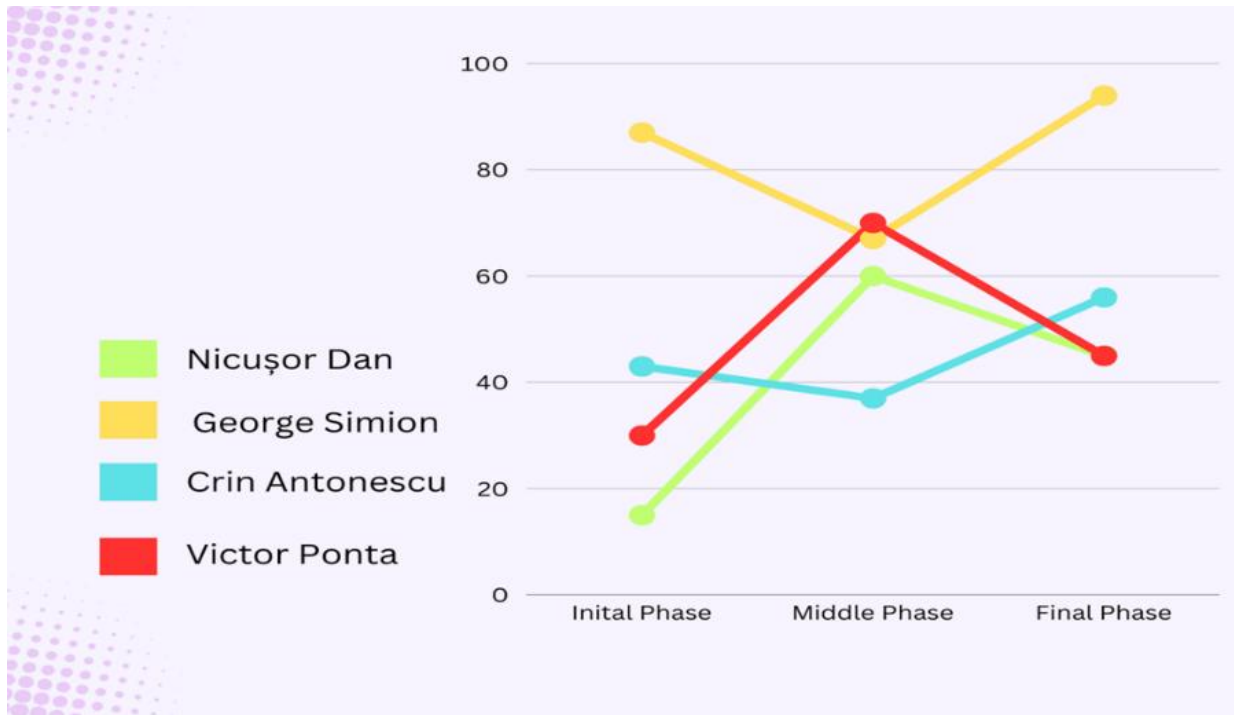
calls for civic participation. However, in the middle campaign period, especially around the debates and post the first round, the tone changed drastically. The focus shifted to distancing himself from the radical discourse promoted by George Simion and other candidates, but also on highlighting the incoherence and dangerous implications of their proposals. Even in this tougher campaign phase, Dan's messages retained a balanced tone. He did not resort to insults or personal attacks but preferred firm and reasoned arguments. Towards the end of the campaign, the number of negative messages gradually decreased, replaced by messages of mobilization, calls for unity and moderate promises. His strategy was one of alternation: he used negative messages only when he felt it was necessary, while maintaining a coherent and moderate image.

George Simion opened his campaign with an aggressive tone, strongly condemning the decisions taken to annul the second round of elections, and clearly positioning himself on the side of Călin Georgescu. He blamed Romania's Constitutional Court and the Brussels bureaucrats for this perceived attack on Romanian democracy. The middle phase of Simion's campaign opened with promoting initiatives and policies but quickly regressed into attacking rival parties such as PSD. The final campaign phase was the culmination of the negative messages in his online campaign, where the main focus of attack was Nicușor Dan, adversary in the election's second round. However, he also mentioned other influential politicians, such as Klaus Iohannis or Traian Băsescu, to ensure that his voters understood that he represented Romania's only chance, positioning himself as the saviour of the nation.

The first part of Crin Antonescu's campaign was monopolized by positive messages. After this non-aggressive opening period, he starts to combine negative messages with positive ones and reaches a certain balance of content. In the middle period, positive messages were more present, announcing his vision and policy proposals. Heading toward the final phase of the campaign, however, messages containing accusations, especially towards George Simion, because of his lack of engagement with debates and the purported danger he represents.

Victor Ponta's campaign took place in a shorter period than the other candidates: between April 4 and May 4, but did not prevent a constant and intense use of negative messages. The beginning of the campaign was rather restrained, with positive accents and appeals to national identity, but very quickly the tone changed. In the middle period of the campaign, Ponta's negative messages visibly increased, especially around public debates and attacks from other candidates. His messages started directly targeting political opponents, but also state institutions, the judiciary, and structures perceived as part of a corrupt elite. A strategy based on opposition to the "system" and the rhetoric that elections are rigged in favour of others took shape. Towards the end of the campaign, the frequency of negative messages decreased slightly, but they continued to exist, maintaining the same critical line. The strategy seems to have been a concentrated one: a restrained start, a burst of attacks in the middle period, followed by a tempered tone at the campaign's end.

Figure 1. Proportion of negative messages during the presidential election campaign



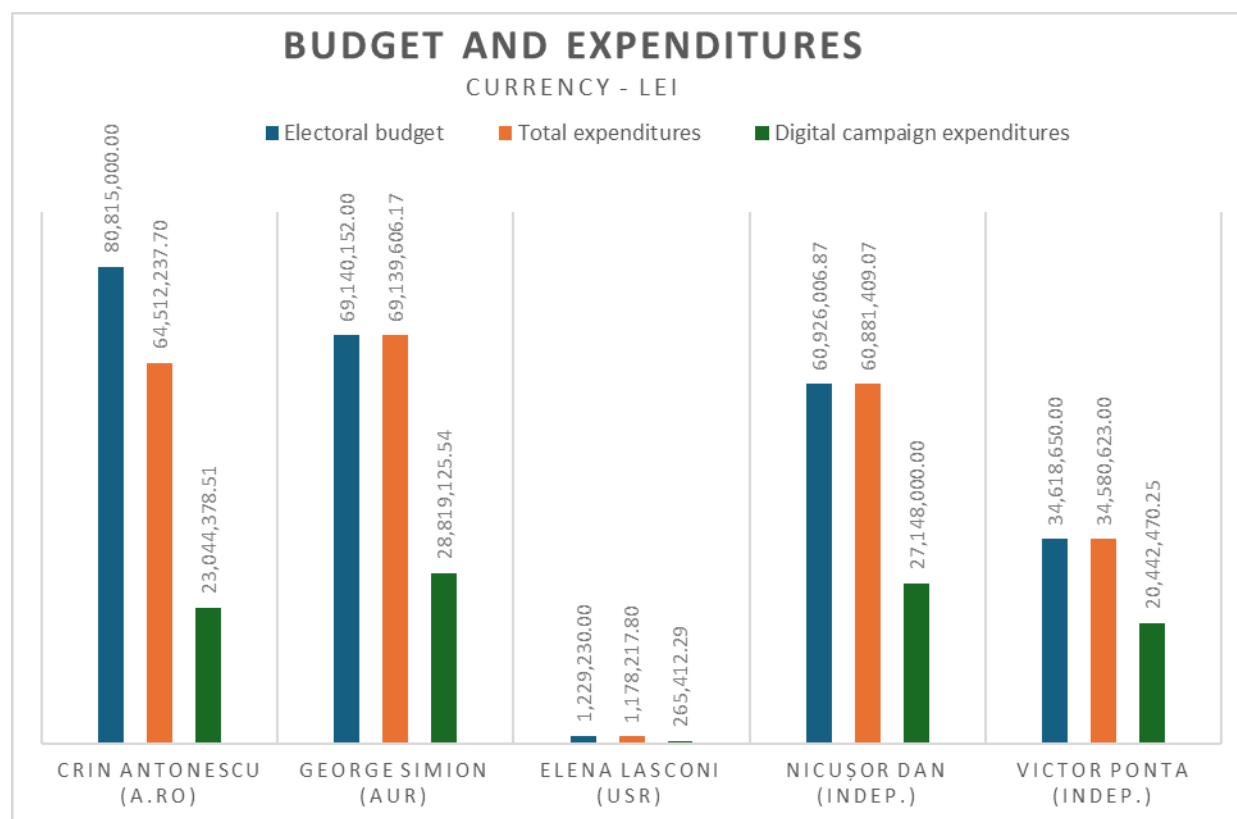
Source: Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

5. Online campaign expenditures in the Romanian national elections

In this section we focus on the financial aspects of the presidential campaign. Looking at the financial figures published by the candidates, we determine how each of them chose to distribute their resources in this campaign, with a particular focus on the money spent on digital campaigning.

Results

Figure 2. Budgets and expenditures comparison of the first five candidates



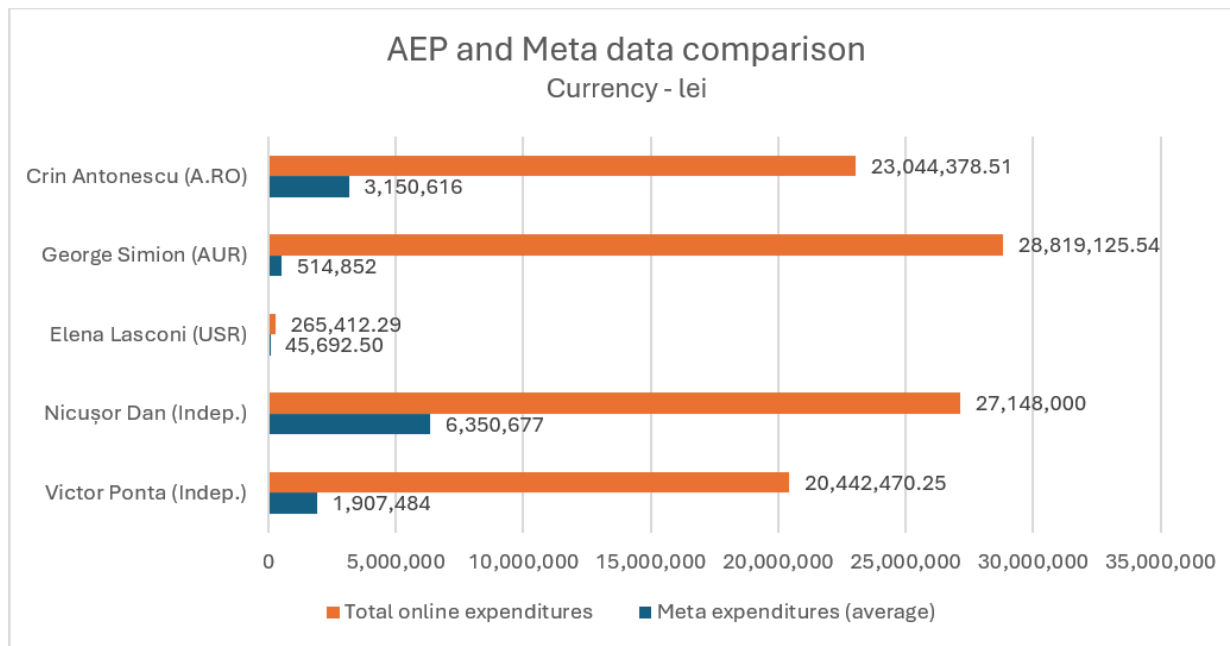
Source: [Permanent Electoral Authority](#), last accessed June 2025

Figure 2 shows that the largest expenditures belong to Crin Antonescu and Electoral Alliance Romania Forward (A.RO), composed of Social Democratic Party (PSD), National Liberal Party (PNL) and Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR). In the 2024 presidential election these parties were the largest spenders (PSD in particular), thus explaining Crin Antonescu's large budget. More surprising, however, is the strong presence of independent candidates and the sums allocated to their campaigns. In contrast, there was only one independent candidate among the five most voted candidates in the 2024 presidential election, and his budget and expenditures were significantly lower. Elena Lasconi, who had the second largest budget and who got into the second round of the 2024 election, lost her party's both political and financial support, which explains the low budget and the subsequent low number of votes. George Simion's budget increased to over ten times the sum allocated for the 2024 election, so that he is now the candidate with the second largest budget.

Despite Crin Antonescu and A.RO having the highest campaign expenditure, only Nicușor Dan and George Simion would pass the threshold to remain candidates in the second round of

elections. Also, it is important to mention that an independent candidate – Nicușor Dan – had higher expenditures than many parties, such as AUR or USR.

Figure 3. Expenditures comparison of the first five candidates, Meta and AEP data



Source: [Permanent Electoral Authority](#) and Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

As seen above, Figure 3 represents a comparison between financial data of the candidates obtained from the Permanent Electoral Authority (AEP) and average of Meta ads expenditures, according to our analysis. We can see that George Simion spent the largest amount on the digital campaign but only 1.79% of this amount was used for the Meta ad campaign. Closely following is Nicușor Dan, the second highest spender on the digital campaign and the candidate with the biggest amount allocated to the Meta campaign – 23.39% of the digital campaign expenditures. Crin Antonescu’s Meta campaign accounted for 13.68% of the amounts spent on the digital campaign. In the case of Victor Ponta, 9.33% of the digital campaign expenditures are attributed to the Meta campaign. Elena Lasconi’s low budget is again highlighted, despite having one of the highest percentages of Meta campaign expenditures, 17.22% of the digital campaign expenditures.

Table 4. Comparison of the number of impressions, the size of the audience reached, and the number of ads posted by the five candidates

Candidate	Most frequently reached audience size	Ads reaching over 1.000.000 people	Total number of ads
Crin Antonescu (A.RO)	Over 1.000.000	54	269

George Simion (AUR)	500.000-599.999	9	96
Elena Lasconi (USR)	350.000-399.999	2	15
Nicușor Dan (Indep.)	0-999	77	1047
Victor Ponta (Indep.)	Over 1.000.000	87	132

Source: Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

The dynamics of Meta ad audience reach were very diverse in this election. Table 4 illustrates that the largest number of Meta ads belongs to Nicușor Dan – 1047. He is followed by Crin Antonescu (A.RO) – 269 ads –, and independent candidate Victor Ponta – 132. George Simion got 96 electoral ads and Elena Lasconi got only 15.

It is impressive that two independent candidates have the largest number of ads that reached more than 1.000.000 individuals – Victor Ponta with 87 ads and Nicușor Dan with 77 ads. Crin Antonescu, the candidate supported by the two largest parties in Romania has a significant number of such ads 1.000.000 – 54.

Looking at the most frequently reached audience by the ads of each candidate, we see that the Crin Antonescu’s ads managed to reach an audience higher than 1.000.000 individuals more often than other audience sizes, despite not having the highest number of ads that reached this same audience size; in the case of Victor Ponta, the most frequently reached audience size is that of 1.000.000 people. George Simion’s ads most frequently reached audiences between 500.000 and 599.999 individuals, followed by Elena Lasconi, whose ads most frequently reached audience size is between 350.000 and 399.999 individuals. Nicușor Dan’s ads have most frequently reached audiences of less than 1000 individuals.

Figure 4. Comparison of the number of age groups, gender, social background, and languages spoken targeted by ads the of the five candidates

Crin Antonescu (A.RO)	George Simion (AUR)	Elena Lasconi (USR)	Nicușor Dan (Indep.)	Victor Ponta (Indep.)
The 35-55 age group was targeted more often	No specific age group targeted	The people over 35 were targeted more often	All age groups over 30 were targeted more often	No specific age group targeted
No specific gender targeted	1.4% of ads targeted women (5 ads)	Almost half of the ads targeted women	19.4% of ads targeted women (170 ads)	No specific gender targeted

			3% of ads targeted men (44)	
0.9% of ads targeted the people with family or friends living abroad (2 ads)	1.8% of ads targeted entrepreneurs (3 ads)	No specific group targeted	9.4% of ads targeted high school graduates (48 ads) 7.4% of ads targeted people generally interested in education (29 ads)	No specific group targeted
All ads targeted Romanians	1.5% of ads targeted Hungarians (3 ads)	All ads targeted Romanians	1.4% of ads targeted Hungarians (2 ads)	All ads targeted Romanians

Source: Meta Ad Library, last accessed June 2025

Crin Antonescu’s ads on the Meta platforms targeted more people aged between 35 and 55 years old. None of his ads were tailored to any gender, and all ads were in the Romanian language.

Regarding George Simion, his ads rarely specifically targeted any group. We can say that 1.8% of ads targeted entrepreneurs. We see that 1.5% of ads targeted Hungarians, though the overwhelming majority of the ads targeted Romanian speakers.

Elena Lasconi adopted a similar tactic – people over 35 years old were targeted more often by her ads. Also, arguably as expected, approximately half of her ads were targeted women. None of the ads were addressed to anyone other than Romanian speakers.

Regarding independent candidate Nicușor Dan, his ads were focused more on individuals over 30 years old. Only 19% of his ads targeted women. Approximately 9% of ads targeted recent high school graduates, and 7.4% of the ads targeted people generally interested in education. Only 1% of ads were for Hungarian speakers.

Victor Ponta’s ads targeted only Romanian speakers, but he opted not to address any specific age, gender or social group.

6. Conclusion

The last digital electoral campaign contained multiple narratives of mis-, dis- and mal-information, with a strong tilt towards disinformation. George Simion, despite having the fewest number of sponsored adverts, promoted the most messages containing false information and malinformation, while the other three candidates had a relatively low number of such messages, compared to their total ads promoted on Meta during the electoral campaign.

The 2025 presidential campaign highlighted, more than ever, the profound transformation of the Romanian electoral space under the influence of the digital environment. The analysis of the four main candidates: Nicușor Dan, George Simion, Crin Antonescu, and Victor Ponta highlights extremely different communication strategies built around distinct political typologies. On the one hand, we revealed candidates who relied on balance, pragmatism, and rational discourse (such as Nicușor Dan), and on the other hand, candidates who resorted to violent messages, populist rhetoric and calls for revolt against the system (such as George Simion and Victor Ponta). At the heart of these campaigns was a sharp contrast between positive and negative messages, between discursive construction and demolition. Those who cultivated the negative messages in a calculated way, such as Crin Antonescu or Nicușor Dan, managed to maintain an image of moderate leadership. Conversely, deeply polarizing and confrontational campaigns risked compromising the coherence and credibility of the political discourse. The 2025 campaign thus became a case study of how the digital environment cultivates a space for information and civic engagement, but also fertile ground for radicalised discourse and manipulation.

Overall, the 2025 presidential elections represented a swathe of diverse communication strategies to appeal to disparate sectors of Romanian society. For the first time in recent years, two independent candidates – Nicușor Dan and Victor Ponta – had a budget higher than some of the most important parties in Romania, and focused their efforts on the online sphere.

7.References

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