

The inauthentic network industry on TikTok

What can we observe in the case of the 2025 presidential elections in Romania?

Inauthentic political behavior on TikTok – What do we do about it?



Online election campaigns in Romania have entered a new era, dominated by an industry of political promotion through inauthentic networks. **Although TikTok prohibits official political advertising, in practice we are witnessing an explosion of disguised, coordinated content favorable to certain candidates, created with the aim of simulating popular support and influencing public perception.** This practice not only distorts electoral competition, but also calls into question the integrity of the democratic process.

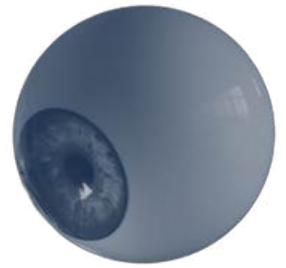
If you want to be a political player on TikTok in 2025, you need to create networks of accounts that amplify your visibility, i.e., a digital infrastructure that ensures your political message gets as much traffic as possible.

We are **witnessing a potential normalization of inauthentic behavior as a dominant campaign strategy.** In the post-Georgescu era, the likelihood of honest actors going viral is negligible compared to those who use coordinated networks of accounts to manipulate public perception.

With less than a month to go before the elections, TikTok content is once again politically significant. What does this mean? **Despite the PR statements of the platforms, which prefer to define themselves as entertainment spaces, social networks are inevitably expressions of real-life interests. But what do we do when the simulation of real life is invaded by networks of bots and coordinated accounts seeking to create an alternative reality to advance a political agenda?**

After the canceled 2024 presidential election, in which the winning strategy was massive promotion on social media, it was predictable that candidates would turn to these channels. The problem, however, is different: we are witnessing the emergence of a parallel, completely opaque industry in which undeclared political advertising is becoming the norm. As we mentioned in our reports published in December[1], the fact that TikTok officially bans political ads does not mean that they do not exist. On the contrary: on a platform with over 9 million users in Romania, this ban has led to the normalization of promotion through advertising accounts that hide under the guise of supporting accounts, many of which engage in practices that are ethically questionable, at least.

[1] <https://expertforum.ro/tiktok-in-timp-de-criza-episodul-ii/>



Why is this happening? Because it is more effective – and legally ambiguous – to hire a marketing agency that creates dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of accounts promoting a particular candidate. This artificially influences the public's perception of who is "popular" or "trustworthy." The problem here is this: how can an honest candidate who wants to play by the rules have a competitive online campaign? The answer is that they can't. By choosing to communicate only from your own account, you deliberately put yourself at a disadvantage in an unbalanced digital race.

We believe that a major problem we are left with is the trend of allowing platforms to declare that they do not carry political advertising. We are referring here to the fact that TikTok does not allow political advertising on its platform, and Google has announced that it will also stop political advertising in response to the new European TTPA regulation, Regulation (EU) 2024/900 of the European Parliament and of the Council of March 13, 2024, on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, which will be implemented from October 2025. The reality is that this ban does not mean the absence of political advertising, but rather its masking under various pretexts of organic content such as support accounts that duplicate official accounts, claim to produce entertainment, satire, or anything else that is permitted by the platforms.

We consider this to be a fundamental logical error. You cannot argue that a social network is not politicized during election periods, when socializing itself involves debating issues of public interest. In discussions with the platforms, we receive technical or formal explanations, but the reality on the ground is completely different. Moreover, Romanian law prohibits third-party campaign financing.

The result is that all the money goes through a candidate's account and no other expenses are allowed. Although this makes it easier for the authorities to monitor, in reality third parties do exist and finance election campaigns. The conclusion is that they should rather be regulated, especially in the digital age when campaigns are no longer conducted only on paper or through bland television advertisements. The fact that Romania prohibits third parties does not mean that they do not exist and do not act in the political context.

National context and activities of the authorities

However, it is important to look at things in context. On the one hand, we are talking about high-impact online activity, which in some cases violates legislation on political advertising and election campaign financing. *It is difficult to assess exactly how much of the online activity is legal and how much is not, as we do not have the tools to monitor all the activities of candidates and their supporters – nor would it be realistic to ask a private entity to do so.*

Although Meta and Google's transparency platforms for paid advertising provide a fairly good level of access to information, the situation is different for TikTok. **For example, data provided by Meta allowed us to identify numerous unclaimed pages that paid over €100,000 for negative campaigning in violation of the law. On TikTok, we cannot do such monitoring because we do not have access to see what is and what is not paid advertising.** Even on Facebook, it is not easy to track the numerous accounts and networks that use misleading AI-generated content, which have changed their names or activity, etc.

On the other hand, the government regulated political advertising at the beginning of the year, assigning the BEC the complicated task of ordering the removal of content. What we notice instead is that the BEC's activity does not always seem proportionate to the real problem. The BEC decided to remove a relatively large number of posts based on complaints received from citizens and political parties, especially from the AUR. However, with organized networks, the situation is more problematic if there is no complaint.

Even so, the BEC only resolves complaints if exact links to the offending posts are sent. If an account has 200 potentially illegal posts and the BEC receives 5 of them, the decisions do not apply to the remaining 195.

The logic is as follows:

- The government issued Emergency Ordinance 1/2025 establishing rules on political advertising in a non-transparent manner and without any consultation. The ordinance is partly based on EU Regulation 2024/900 on transparency and targeting of political advertising. It introduces obligations for political actors to label political advertising and will mostly come into force in October. The government has taken part of the Regulation, which refers exclusively to paid advertising, and transposed it for all campaign activity.
 - **The biggest problem is the definition of a political actor. The status of a political actor is defined in Article 3 of the Regulation, which has already entered into force. It should be noted that not everyone who writes about a candidate or the campaign should become a political actor.** And the fact that someone becomes a political actor does not mean that they cannot post, but that they must label the advertisement.
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- Political actors are primarily linked to a particular role – candidate, party, campaign member, elected representative of a party, etc. – as explained by the AEP in its guide on the labeling of political advertising:
- *"Political actors are considered to be political parties, organizations of citizens belonging to national minorities, their candidates or independent candidates, any party member who holds an elected office and promotes the party they represent (local councilor, mayor, county councilor, county council president, member of parliament, senator, MEP, member of the national or local administration) and any natural or legal person representing or acting on behalf of any of the above-mentioned persons or organizations and promoting the political objectives of any of these persons or organizations."*
- The regulation refers in particular to paid activities or actors who have links to a political party or campaign and therefore act in a structured and repetitive manner in relation to that party. Communications that constitute journalistic activity aimed at informing the public, or public opinion expressed in a personal capacity by persons other than political actors, do not constitute political advertising material, as stated in the Regulation and in HAEP 9.
- The draft law approving the Emergency Ordinance passed only tacitly through the Senate, and what was discussed in the committees was not taken up because it did not pass the plenary. The law is now blocked in the Chamber of Deputies, with no chance of passing in time. In any case, any change in procedure would be strange at this point.
- Through Decision 9, the AEP could have better defined what an actor is. On a positive note, the AEP organized a consultation with several civic organizations before the debates on the approval of the decision. Not only did the HAEP not come out better from the debates, but almost none of the ideas discussed were taken up, and any reference to the definition of an actor disappeared.
- Through the OUG, the BEC was designated as the authority responsible for handling complaints about political advertising on very large platforms such as Facebook or TikTok. The rest of the complaints regarding the online environment remained the responsibility of the county offices.
- The BEC makes decisions, which are orders within the meaning of the Digital Services Act (DSA), through which it can request platforms to remove content. This does not mean that it is automatically deleted; platforms can carry out their own checks on the rules they are violating. According to Emergency Ordinance 1/2025, platforms have five hours to take down content, which is completely unrealistic. This process does not exclude the possibility of users submitting complaints directly to platforms for violations of their internal rules.
- The BEC has started publishing statistics on the decisions it has taken, which is a good thing. However, it is not clear how many of the materials were taken down in a timely manner. We also do not know whether other institutions have issued orders to remove content or entire accounts.
- The number of appeals against BEC decisions to the Court of Appeal is low. On April 22, the BEC reported that "19 decisions—3% of the total number—adopted by the BEC since the start of the election campaign on April 4, 2025, either admitting complaints or rejecting them, have been challenged in court by the individuals or legal entities concerned. or rejecting them, have been challenged in court by interested individuals or legal entities, with 16 decisions upheld to date and 3 cases still pending." [2]

[2] https://prezidentiale2025.bec.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CP_47.pdf

EFOR, as part of the Vot Corect coalition, tried to find out more about how these decisions are made, but we were unable to do so because the BEC was unable to meet with us due to a busy schedule, largely caused by the wave of complaints of this type. What we do know is that they are made by the members—so it's not just the secretariat—but with so many decisions to make, it's hard to believe they discuss them in detail. It is also true that some of these decisions do not require much debate, as they are rejected on technical grounds. However, we do not know how collegially the decisions are taken, because the BEC meetings are not public.

This entire process has generated several problems. On the one hand, it has blocked the BEC, which does not seem to have time for anything else, as it receives dozens of complaints every day. Between April 4 and 23, the BEC issued 693 decisions either accepting or rejecting complaints: 364 decisions were accepted and 329 were rejected. Some of the complaints were rejected on procedural grounds because they did not meet the legal requirements—for example, there was no valid link. Each of these decisions may have one link or dozens of links. Even the Expert Forum submitted a complaint containing dozens of links to content promoted by certain unclaimed Facebook pages. This seems like an intense and very time-consuming activity.

On the other hand, based on an unclear law, the BEC has added further criteria, which may be debatable. In addition to the existing definitions, if you are a celebrity or post regularly, you become a political actor. It is highly debatable how these criteria were introduced – the BEC claims that it is based on practice – and what constitutes repeated posting. If someone posts daily about a candidate, do they become a political actor, even if they do not fit the definition? Because the regulation does not refer to the repetitiveness of the message. The BEC has stated that if a person posts "predominantly and repetitively, as directly and immediately observed by the BEC, electoral propaganda material, then individuals acquire the status of political actors with the potential to influence the electorate." I agree that a highly visible person who posts insistently can have an influence, but this raises a number of fundamental questions: what does repetitive and predominantly mean?

Some posts were removed because they were allegedly posted by people who could influence voters. How do we define celebrity and where does it begin? Does the number of posts, followers, interactions, reposts matter, or who the person is? We understand and support the fact that we do not want to repeat the 2024 election year, with influencers promoting candidates without limits and non-transparent funding, but all these criteria should have been clearly regulated from the outset, not defined along the way by the BEC, which should not be inventing legislation.

We should also note that there are certain individuals or entities that are very active in filing complaints. For example, the name A.S. appears about 133 times – it may also appear in other forms, such as S.A. The AUR party appears 44 times – AUR is a party that theoretically advocates freedom of speech, but seems to be very active in making complaints.

The BEC has attempted, including through press releases, to explain the process to the public and interested parties, but we believe that a guide written in accessible language would have helped from the outset. It should be noted that most users are probably unfamiliar with the language and do not read European regulations, so the Romanian state should have been more active in providing explanations.

An example of an explanation that could have been clearer is that relating to members of parties that did not register candidates:

Members of political parties that are not electoral competitors may also freely express their opinion on a candidate. The identification of political opinions expressed in a personal capacity should normally result from individual self-determination, but contextual elements such as those set out in recital (30) of the preamble to Regulation 2024/900[4] may be taken into account.

In some cases, it is debatable what constitutes political advertising: for example, in Decision 65D, the BEC requested the removal of material that "urges voters to write the name of a person who is not on the list of candidates for the 2025 presidential elections on their ballot paper, thus constituting an indirect call not to vote for any of the candidates in the presidential elections, but is not labeled in accordance with the provisions in force."

However, in Decision 330D, the BEC ruled that criticism of presidential candidate Nicușor Dan by Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu—a political actor as defined by law—did not violate the law. The BEC also stated that: "In particular, with regard to complaints about online communications by political actors holding elected or other public office, the BEC ruled that situations in which the posted materials refer to the manner in which candidates have performed their duties in their current or past positions, without containing a direct or indirect call to vote or not to vote, do not qualify such materials as political advertising." In other words, a political actor with significant influence can write about a candidate who has previously held or currently holds a position, saying that they are doing a great or terrible job, but without directly saying to vote or not to vote, and the electorate is not influenced. We believe that this interpretation may be an arbitrary exception to the rule.

We believe that some of the content promoted through podcasts or by influencers may also fall into a gray area. For example, there have been several complaints about posts by influencer Vlad Mercori, who produced a series of materials about Nicușor Dan, based on his work as mayor. These were considered by the BEC (see decision 766) to be materials produced as part of a journalistic endeavor. This raises the question of what constitutes a journalistic endeavor. But if such a person produces negative materials only about one candidate, can it still be considered journalistic information?

It is difficult to compile statistics on content, and we will not go through all the decisions, as the format in which they are published—scanned PDFs—makes this impossible without significant effort.

[4] https://prezidentiale2025.bec.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CP_48.pdf

In short, legislation that was necessary in practice was approved through a non-transparent process and leads to sometimes questionable decisions that have the potential to affect freedom of expression and equal opportunities for candidates.

The Romanian government has failed to clarify the context in which the legislation applies and what constitutes a political actor. At the European level, there have been lengthy discussions about the Regulation and who it should apply to. Although we believe that there should be regulations on online advertising—especially when it is the new reality—they should have been debated publicly and clearly defined from the outset, not invented along the way. We hope that the process of implementing the regulation in Romania will be consultative, in order to avoid such discussions later on.

In fact, EFOR has proposed a commitment in the new action plan of the Open Government Partnership in this regard. We understand that the BEC cannot refuse complaints because they are regulated by law, but it can avoid controversial decisions and interpretations. Last but not least, the Romanian state should take a proportionate approach to monitoring illegal activity—it should not only request the removal of specific posts, but above all take action to eliminate extensive networks that operate illegally.

Judging by these examples, it is not very clear what the standard for decision-making is, given that some citizens' posts have been removed, while others with an obvious political impact have not been affected and are exempt from flagging.

General considerations: Who dominates political TikTok?



We have identified over 600 videos that appear to exhibit coordinated inauthentic behavior.

About the inauthentic networks behind the most visible presidential candidates

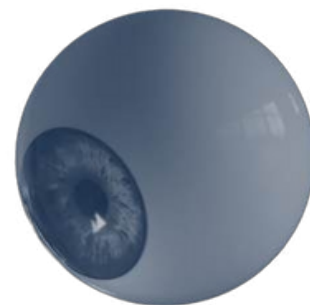
Over the last 30 days, we have monitored the main hashtags associated with each candidate in the 2025 presidential election. The analysis mainly included videos that exceeded 10,000 views in order to maximize their relevance and impact.

We identified a total of 270 inauthentic videos promoting candidate George Simion and 180 videos from inauthentic networks promoting Crin Antonescu's candidacy. Apart

In the case of the other candidates – **Nicușor Dan, Victor Ponta, and Elena Lasconi** – **the number of videos of this type is significantly lower (less than 50 appearances)**. At the same time, in these cases, it was more difficult to classify the content as "promotional": some of the inauthentic accounts also posted criticism or contradictory messages, making it impossible to clearly distinguish between support and negative influence.

By comparison, George Simion and Crin Antonescu benefit – intentionally or not – from digital networks that generate predominantly positive inauthentic content, which dominates the space associated with hashtags relevant to their names.

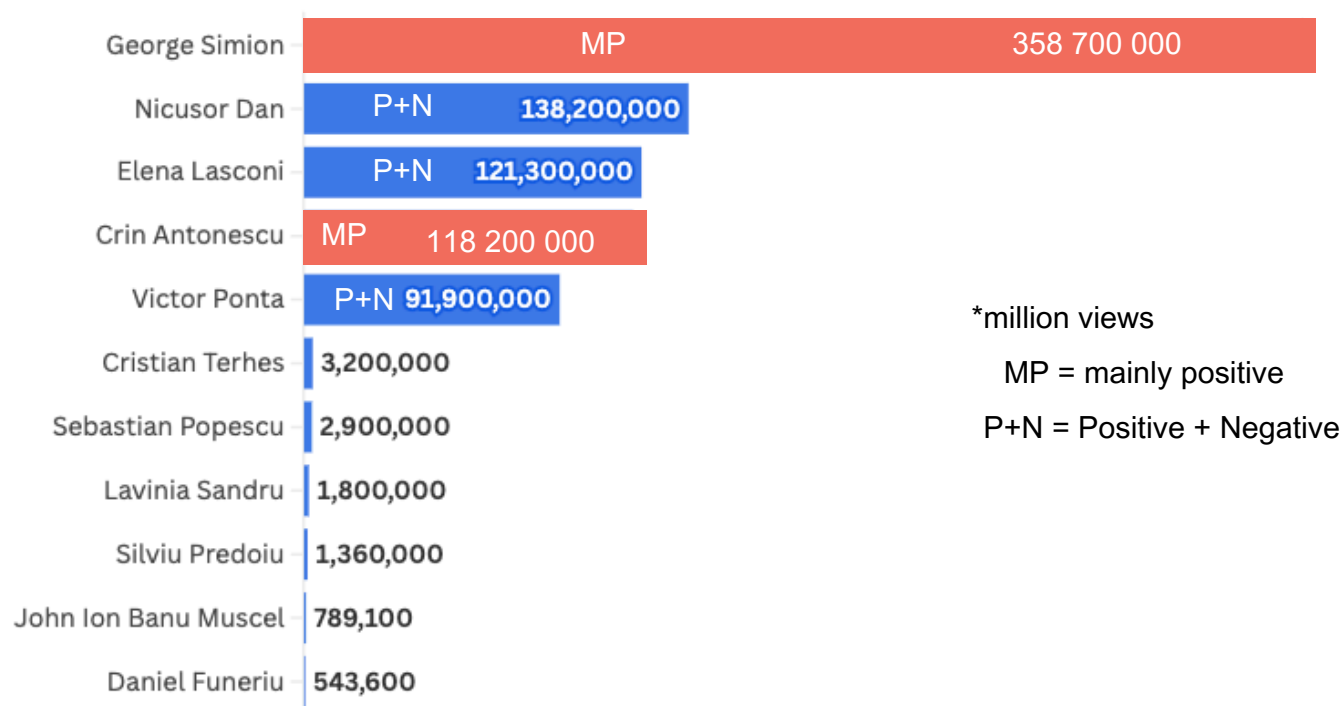
This dynamic raises serious questions about the transparency of election campaigns in the digital environment, about the fairness of opportunities in political competition, but also about the responsibility of platforms that tolerate, implicitly or explicitly, the proliferation of such practices. Moreover, this is only part of a larger landscape that we cannot monitor in its entirety.



TikTok Total Views

Aggregated Hashtags

January - April 2025



These charts are for illustrative purposes only, based on the aggregation of hashtags identified through data scraping. Other hashtags may be relevant. The true magnitude of visibility may be bigger.

This chart illustrates the frequency of hashtags attributed by Expert Forum to each candidate during the monitoring period. It does not indicate the sentiment or nature of the content (positive, negative, or neutral), but rather serves as a preliminary indicator of the volume of conversation surrounding each candidate.

Visibility analysis: George Simion

It should be noted that among the top 20 accounts creating content with the hashtag #georgesimion, there are also accounts that do not directly support him, but promote other candidates. These are the accounts @din.cmpulung (Elena Lasconi), @prezentul.i.viito, and @scopul.comun (both associated with Crin Antonescu's campaign).

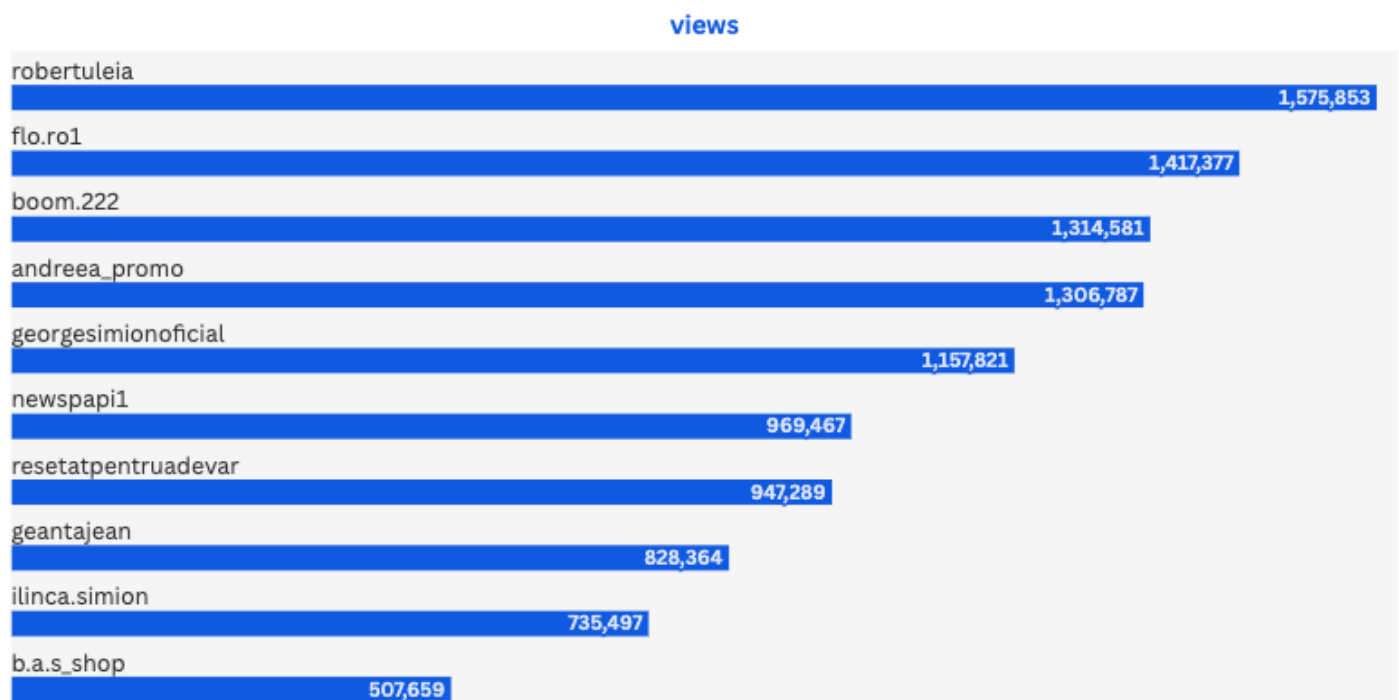
These accounts use the hashtag #georgesimion in their own videos, a common practice in the 2025 digital campaign. The purpose of this behavior is probably to expose their own content to an audience following another candidate—a form of "hijacking" the visibility associated with popular hashtags.

For the sake of accuracy, the views generated by these accounts were not attributed to George Simion, but were calculated for the candidates they explicitly promote in their content.

General - George Simion

Top Accounts Creating Videos (Not necessarily supporting)

Last 30 days



Accounts with most views on the main hashtag associated with the candidate. These are not necessarily producing positive content.

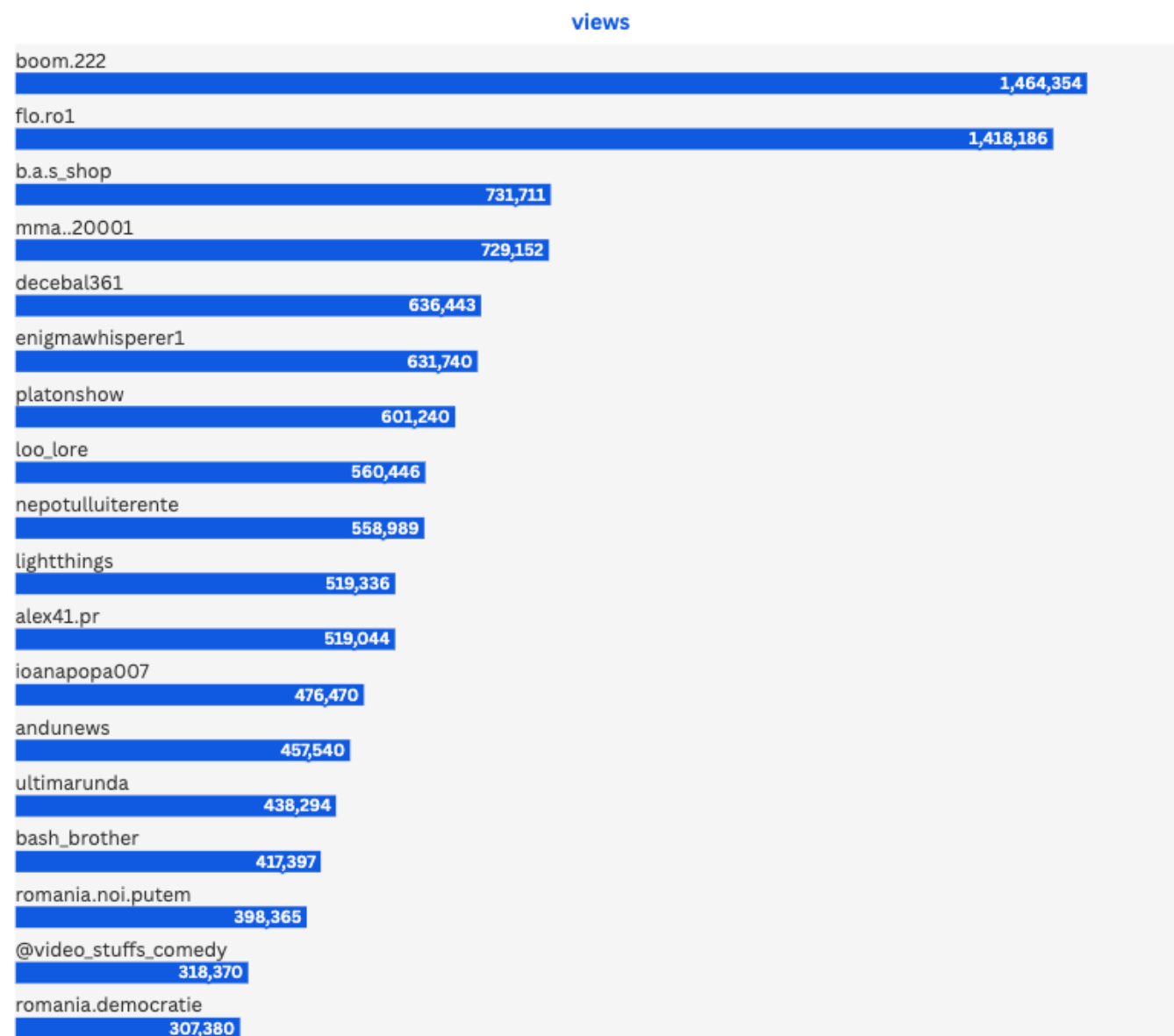
Another relevant dimension of political campaigns is influencer accounts promoting political candidates. In some cases, these may be genuine supporters with large audiences, in others – accounts that appear to be influencers but reproduce coordinated content using patterns specific to inauthentic networks.

At present, there is no transparent or standardized verification framework that allows for a clear distinction between a real supporter and an inauthentic account pretending to be a real person. The mere existence of an email address associated with the account cannot be considered a guarantee of authenticity, especially in the context of accounts that viralize political content during an election campaign.

George Simion

Top Accounts Creating Inauthentic Videos

Last 30 days



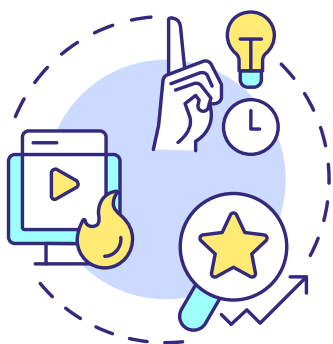
This lack of clarity makes it difficult to accurately assess the digital electoral landscape and raises questions about the responsibility of platforms to provide transparency regarding the source and purpose of impactful political content.

Until clear criteria are established, we remain in a gray area where apparent influence can be artificially constructed and the public can be given a distorted picture of actual electoral support.

George Simion

Metrics for CIB - Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

Last 30 days, Sample Data by Expert Forum



Video Views

39 104 325



Comments

250 288



Shares

263 757

*Videos that support the political candidate, filtered by top views in the last 30 days

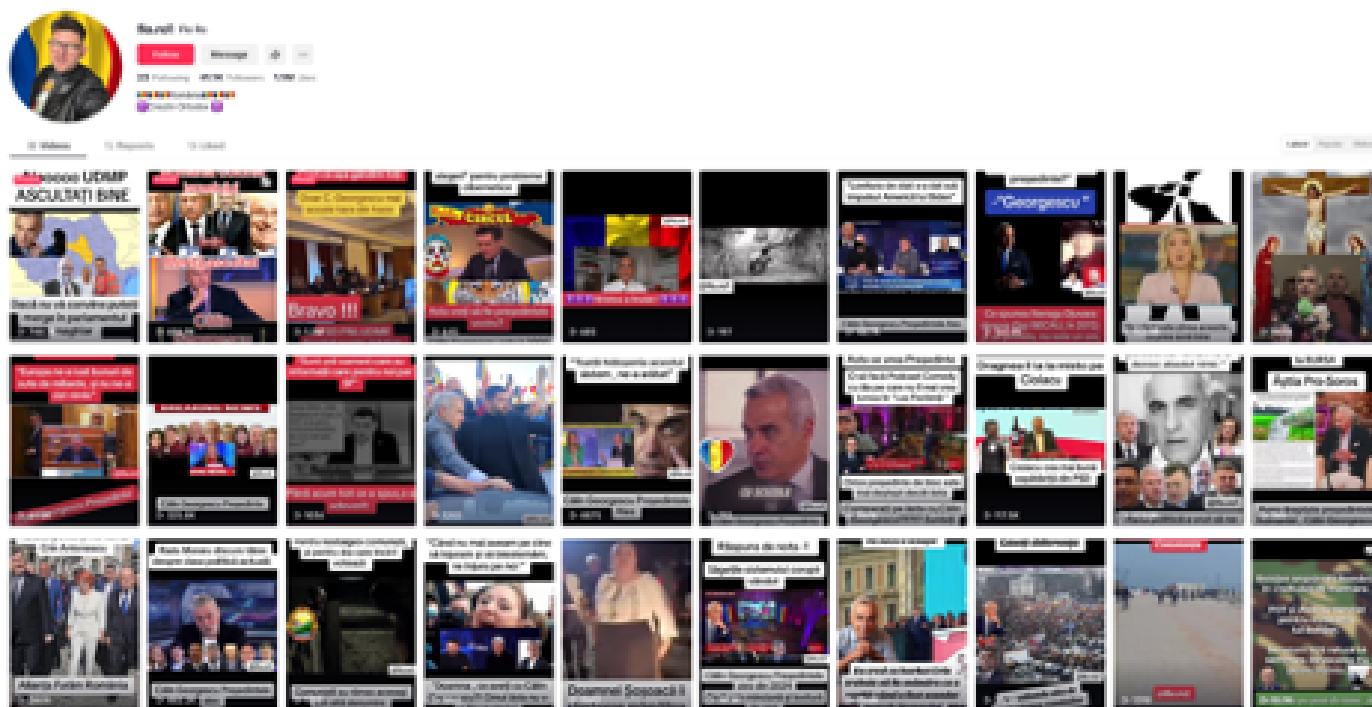
A relevant example is the account **@flo.ro1**. At first glance, it appears to be the profile of a real person: the profile photo shows a young man with the Romanian flag in the background, a symbol often used by TikTok users who wish to associate themselves with patriotic topics.

Is it possible that **@flo.ro1** is a real user who engages in intense political support behavior? Yes, this possibility cannot be ruled out. However, there are several indicators that led us to include the account in our classification of inauthentic accounts:

- It does not contain any personal videos outside the political sphere;
- The content posted is exclusively political, and all videos follow the same graphic and stylistic pattern (fonts, montages, music, editing), identical to that observed in other inauthentic networks promoting candidate George Simion;
- The frequency of posts and the timing of topics suggest coordination.

Given these considerations, we have decided to label this account as inauthentic, likely part of a possible coordinated digital promotion network or campaign.

At the same time, we note the existence of a practice that has not yet been rigorously documented, but is repeatedly observable, whereby accounts initially developed for non-political purposes (e.g., beauty, memes, satire) are subsequently converted into political pages. This type of audience reconversion is difficult to track in the absence of a public history of the account's activity.



Visibility analysis: Nicușor Dan

In the case of candidate Nicușor Dan, we identified a small number of accounts with coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) promoting his campaign. Our estimates show fewer than 50 such accounts, a significantly lower presence compared to George Simion and Crin Antonescu.

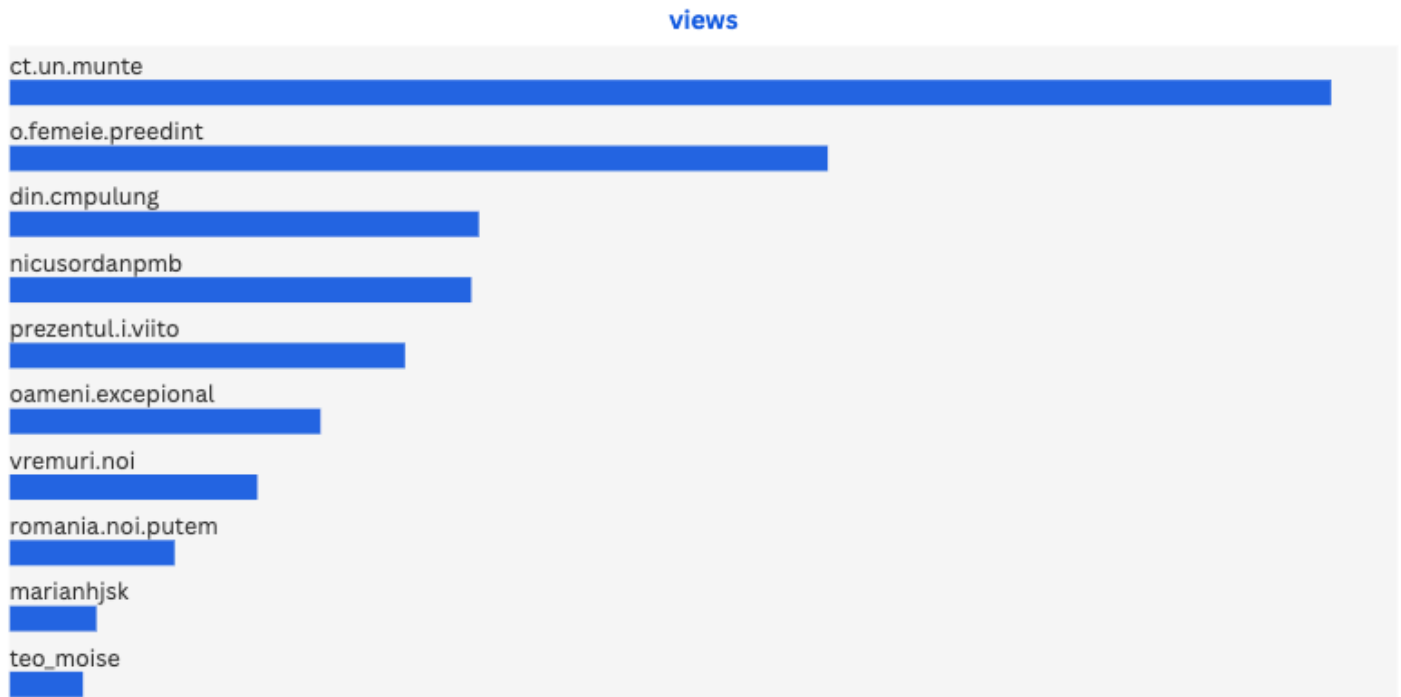
Analysis of the content published under the main hashtag #nicusordan shows that many of the trending videos are not supportive, but promote other candidates or discredit Nicușor Dan. (This trend is also valid for Victor Ponta and Elena Lasconi.)

In the top 10 videos using the hashtag #nicusordan, the only account that explicitly supports the candidate is the official account @nicusordanpmb.

General - Nicusor Dan

Top Accounts Creating Videos (Not necessarily supporting)

Last 30 days



Accounts with most views on the main hashtag associated with the candidate. These are not necessarily producing positive content.

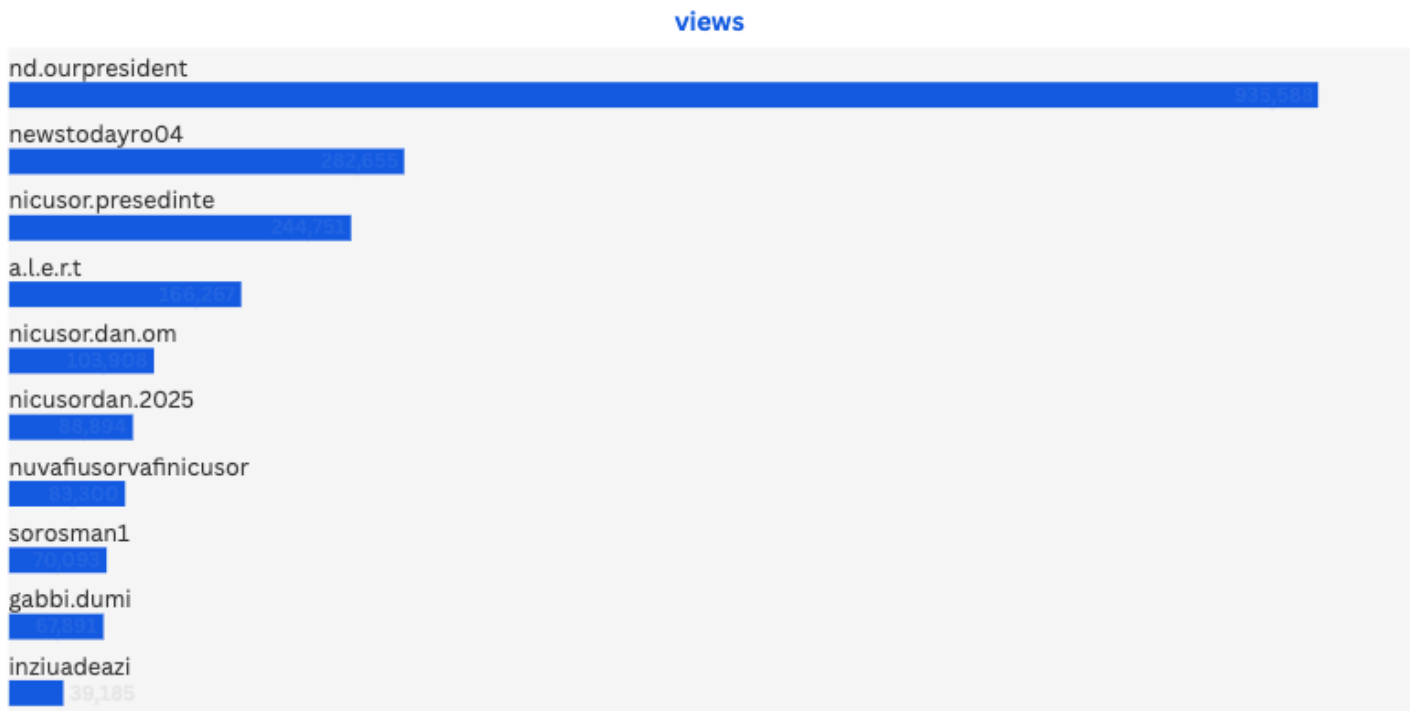
An additional element of interest is the viral spread of the negative hashtag #nicusordancatastrofa, which has accumulated over 1.7 million views. Of these, 563,000 were recorded since the beginning of 2025. The content is mainly produced by accounts such as: @ilfovul.ro – active on regional political issues (Bucharest and Ilfov), @flashparazzi – focused on political and scandalous content, @claudbnz3w5 – account visually associated with pro-George Simion symbols, @about.everything – a "gossip" account that also distributes political messages.

ct.un.munte	Supporting Crin Antonescu
din.cmpulung	Supporting Elena Lasconi
prezentul.i.viito	Supporting Crin Antonescu
nicusordanpmb	Supporting Nicusor Dan
romania.noi.putem	Supporting Crin Antonescu
vremuri.noi	Supporting Crin Antonescu
o.femeie.preedint	Supporting Elena Lasconi, Opposing Nicusor Dan
oameni.exceptional	Opposing Nicusor Dan
marianhjsk	Opposing Nicusor Dan
teo_moise	Satire account

Nicusor Dan

Top Accounts Creating Inauthentic Videos

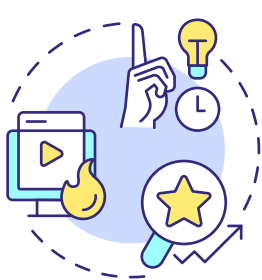
Last 30 days



Nicusor Dan

Metrics for CIB - Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

Last 30 days, Sample Data by Expert Forum



Video Views

2 675 312



Comments

33 294



Shares

19 176

*Videos that support the political candidate, filtered by top views in the last 30 days

Visibility analysis: Crin Antonescu

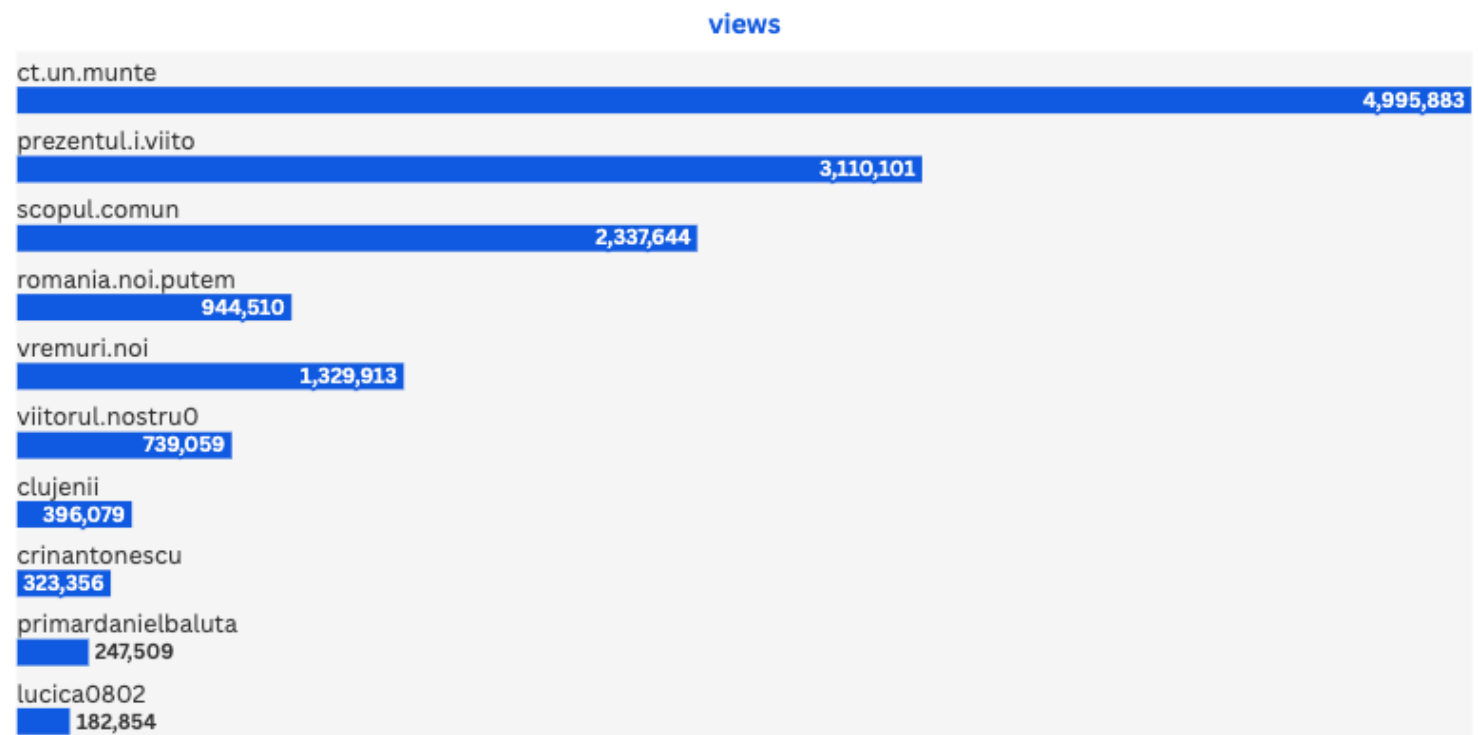
In the case of Crin Antonescu, the official page is neglected in terms of content, with only 17,000 followers. By comparison, all other candidates who have a chance of entering the second round according to the polls have at least 100,000 followers.

How, then, does content about Crin Antonescu manage to be at the top of the visibility rankings and get 118 million views in recent months, with mostly positive content? Through inauthentic promotion networks. In addition to the AUR network, inauthentic videos promoting Crin Antonescu were the most numerous; in the last 30 days alone, we identified 180 such videos.

General Crin Antonescu

Top Accounts Creating Videos (Not necessarily supporting)

Last 30 days

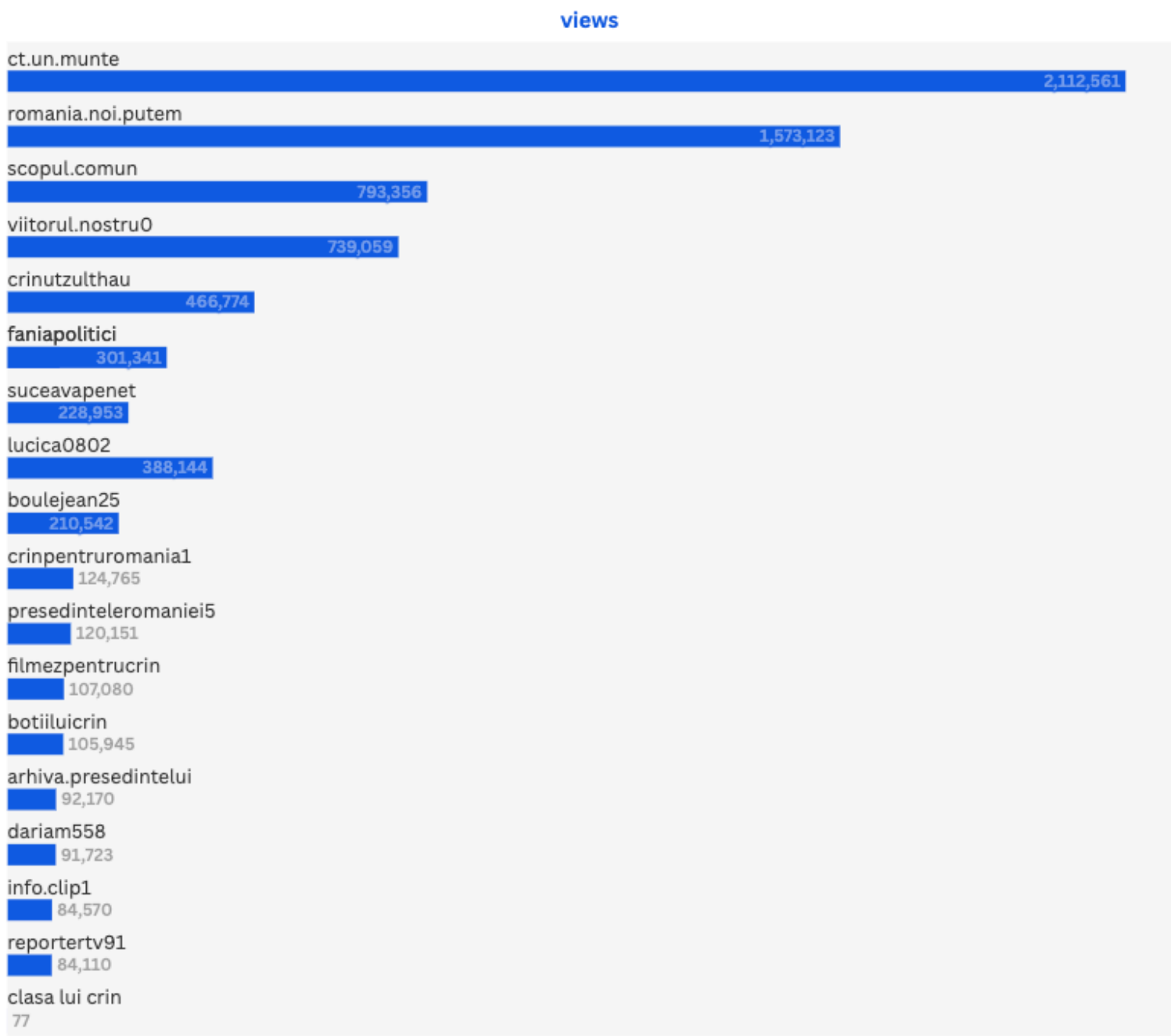


Accounts with most views on the main hashtag associated with the candidate. These are not necessarily producing positive content.

Crin Antonescu

Top Accounts Creating Inauthentic Videos

Last 30 days



Over the past 30 days, candidate Crin Antonescu has enjoyed significant visibility, supported by a small number of accounts that have generated positive or favorable content.

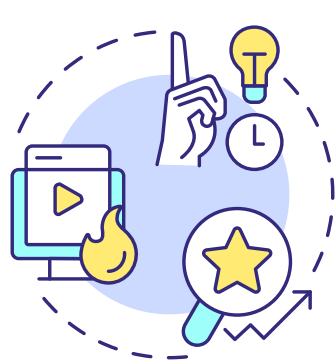
The most visible account was @ct.un.munte, which accumulated nearly 5 million views, representing approximately 33% of the total views associated with the inauthentic support content we analyzed. It is joined by @prezentul.i.viito (over 3 million views) and @scopul.comun (over 2.3 million).

Other accounts with significant impact include @vremuri.noi (1.3 million), @romania.noi.putem (944,000), and @viitorul.nostru0 (739,000). The rest of the top accounts individually generated less than 400,000 views. Overall, these accounts generated a total of 14,940,515 views, 124,136 comments, and 53,460 shares in just 30 days. The high level of engagement and the concentration of distribution on a few sources indicate a possible coordinated amplification strategy in the digital environment.

Crin Antonescu

Metrics for CIB - Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

Last 30 days, Sample Data by Expert Forum



Video Views

14 940 515



Comments

124 136



Shares

53 460

*Videos that support the political candidate, filtered by top views in the last 30 days

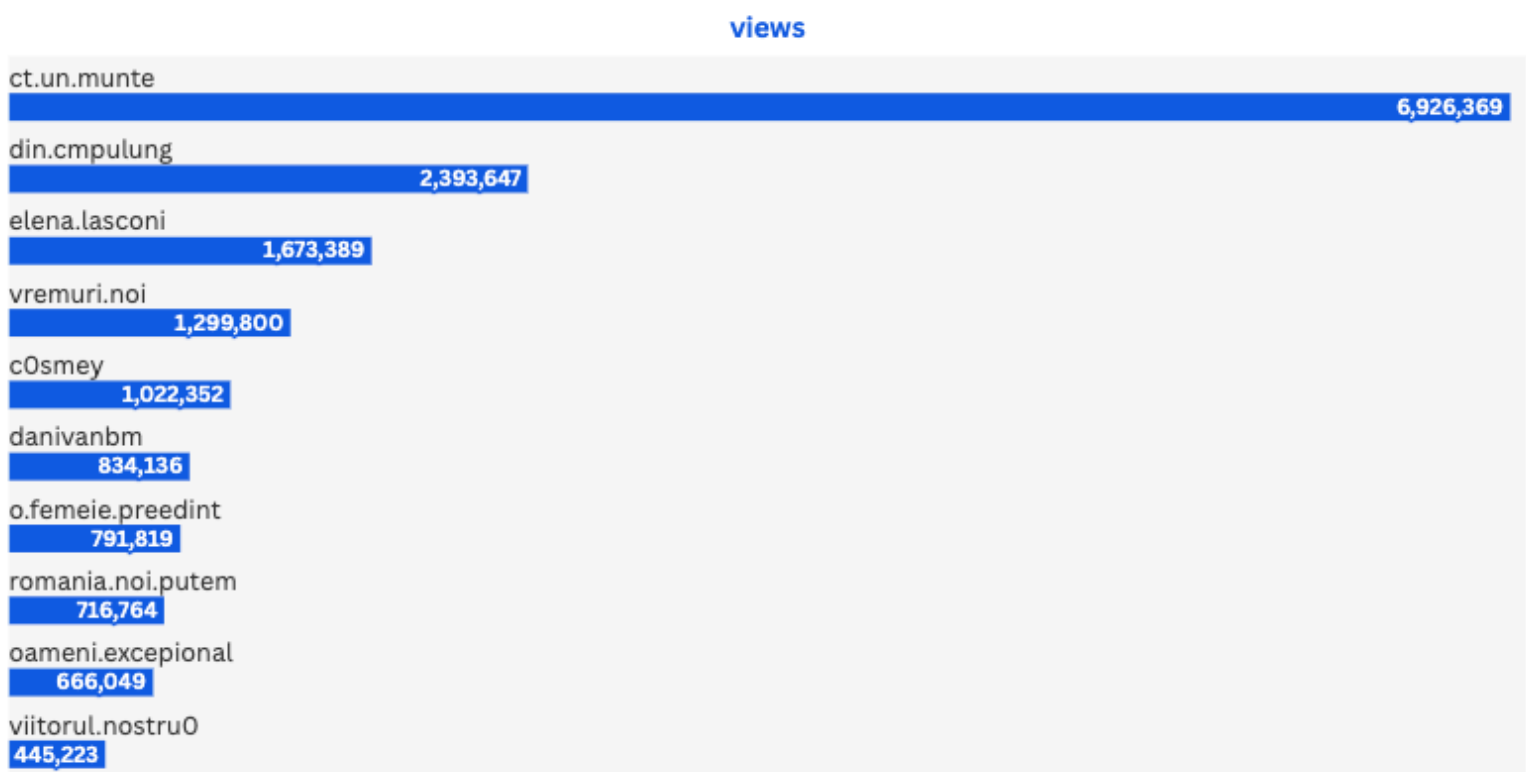
Visibility analysis: Elena Lasconi

In the last 30 days, most of the positive inauthentic videos associated with Elena Lasconi were produced by a small number of accounts. The account @o.femeie. preedint generated the highest volume of views, with approximately 2,095,000 views, followed by @din.cmpulung, which accumulated around 1,764,000 views. Other relevant contributors include: @anne__005 – 367,000 views, @loms8284 – 246,000 views, @guessnewsroom – 240,000 views. The rest of the accounts analyzed had significantly lower visibility, each recording less than 200,000 views, with the smallest account reaching approximately 17,000 views.

General - Elena Lasconi

Top Accounts Creating Videos (Not necessarily supporting)

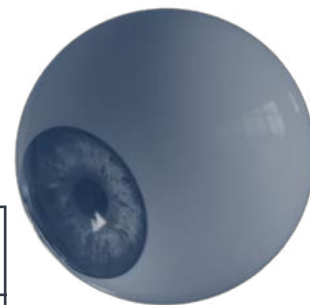
Last 30 days



Accounts with most views on the main hashtag associated with the candidate. These are not necessarily producing positive content.

These graphs are for illustrative purposes only, based on the aggregation of hashtags identified through data scraping. Other hashtags may be relevant.

The true magnitudne of visibility may vary and we expect access to data and tools for researchers from TikTok.



Account Name	Attribution
ct.un.munte	Supporting Crin Antonescu
din.cmpulung	Supporting Elena Lasconi
elena.lasconi	Supporting Elena Lasconi
c0smey	Supporting Elena Lasconi
vremuri.noi	Supporting Crin Antonescu
danivanbm	Supporting Elena Lasconi
o.femeie.preedint	Supporting Elena Lasconi
romania.noi.putem	Supporting Crin Antonescu
oameni.exceptional	Supporting Crin Antonescu
viitorul.nostru0	Supporting Crin Antonescu

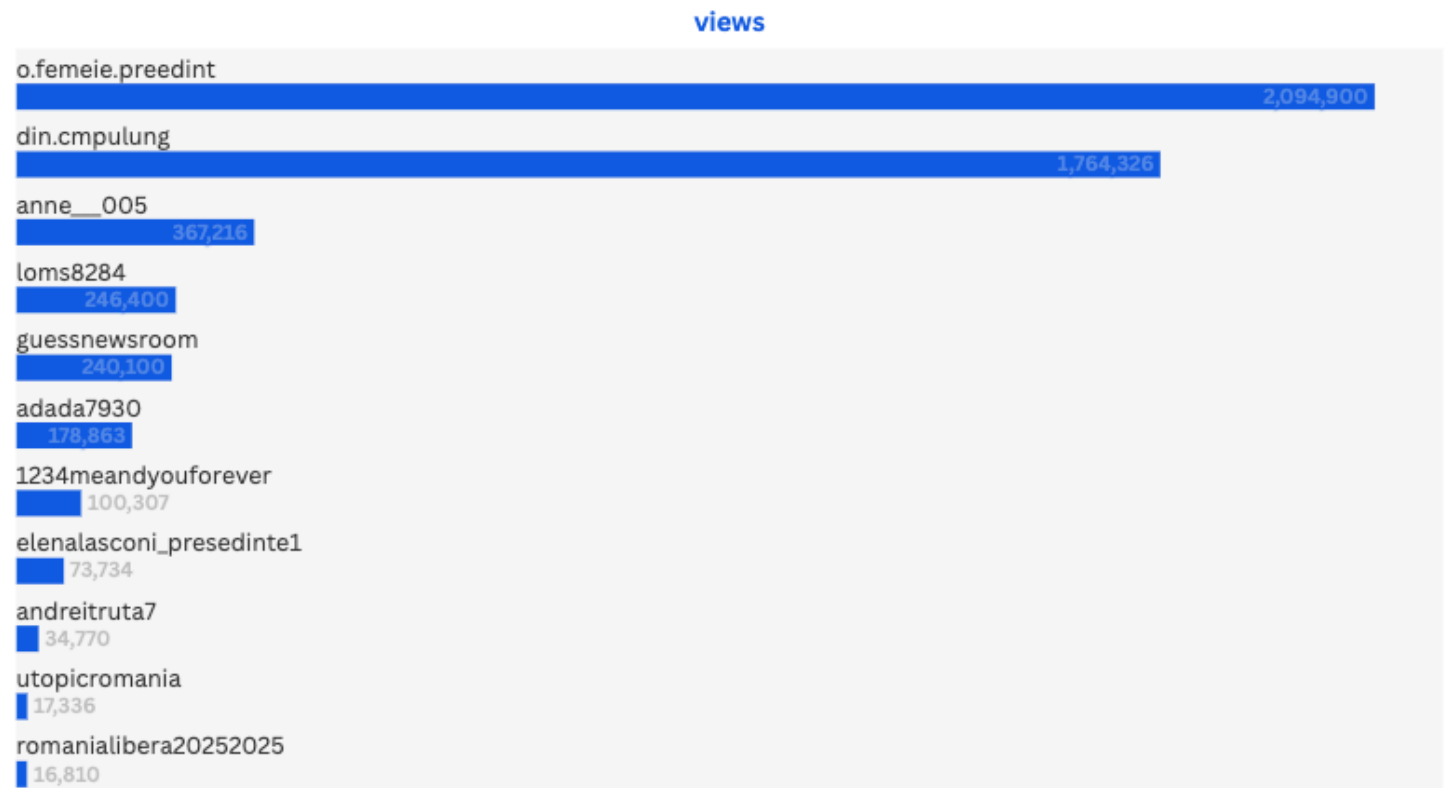
Another trend observed in the analysis of promotional networks is the deliberate use of hashtags associated with other candidates by accounts supporting a competitor. For example, in the overall ranking of videos associated with the hashtag #elenalasconi, accounts such as @ct.un.munte, @vremuri.noi, and @romania.noi.putem appear, accounts that we have attributed to support for Crin Antonescu.

This practice suggests a basic digital amplification strategy whereby accounts attempt to expose their own content to the audience of another candidate. Although not a violation of platform rules, this tactic clearly affects the clarity and relevance of information flows, contributing to a form of intentional confusion that captures the attention of audiences in other bubbles.

Elena Lasconi

Top Accounts Creating Inauthentic Videos

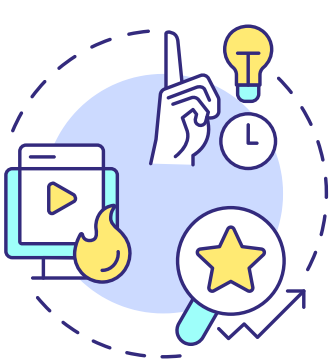
Last 30 days



Elena Lasconi

Metrics for CIB - Coordinated Inauthentic Behaviour

Last 30 days, Sample Data by Expert Forum



Video Views

4 859 326



Comments

3886



Shares

17800

*Videos that support the political candidate, filtered by top views in the last 30 days

Visibility analysis: Victor Ponta

The advertising strategy employed by Victor Ponta differs from that of the other candidates. While the others have larger or smaller networks dedicated to promoting their candidates, Victor Ponta seems to be promoted through two techniques: promoting his own account and entertainment accounts used by other politicians.

Let's look at the use of entertainment accounts, which promote other politicians such as George Simion, Ana Maria Gavrilă, and Călin Georgescu, as well as candidate Victor Ponta.

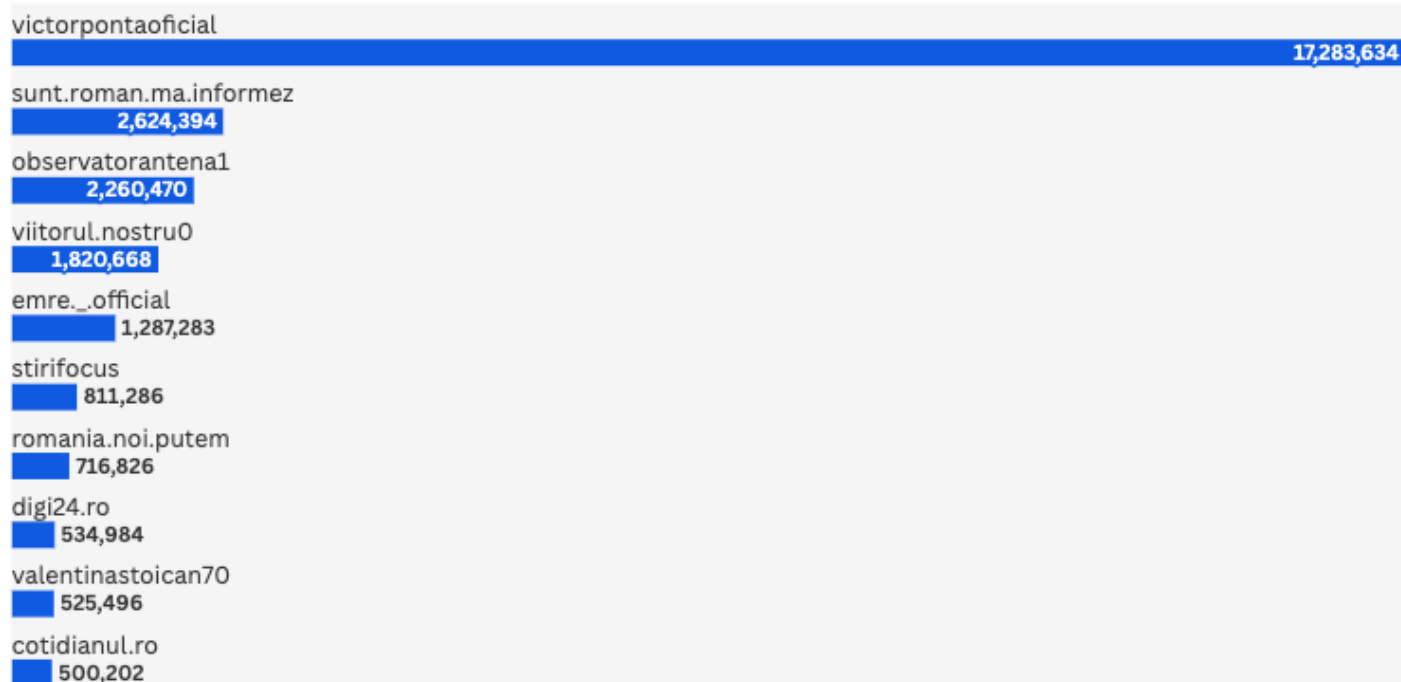
In the case of the @Swapera account, which we identified in December 2024 as promoting exclusively entertainment content, it also began promoting Ana Maria Gavrilă before the parliamentary elections. They even responded to the email we sent to the address in the TikTok account bio: one post costs €200. Just three videos posted by @Swapera generated 135,900 positive views, suggesting an undeclared practice of political advertising.

General - Victor Ponta

Top Accounts Creating Videos (Not necessarily supporting)

Last 30 days

views



Accounts with most views on the main hashtag associated with the candidate. These are not necessarily producing positive content.

These graphs are for illustrative purposes only, based on the aggregation of hashtags identified through data scraping. Other hashtags may be relevant.

The true magnitude of visibility may vary and we expect access to data and tools for researchers from TikTok.

Unlike the other candidates, Victor Ponta seems to have strategically focused on developing his own official TikTok account. In the last 30 days, his page has been featured in over 50 of the 100 most viewed videos under the hashtag #victorponta, with a total of over 17 million views.

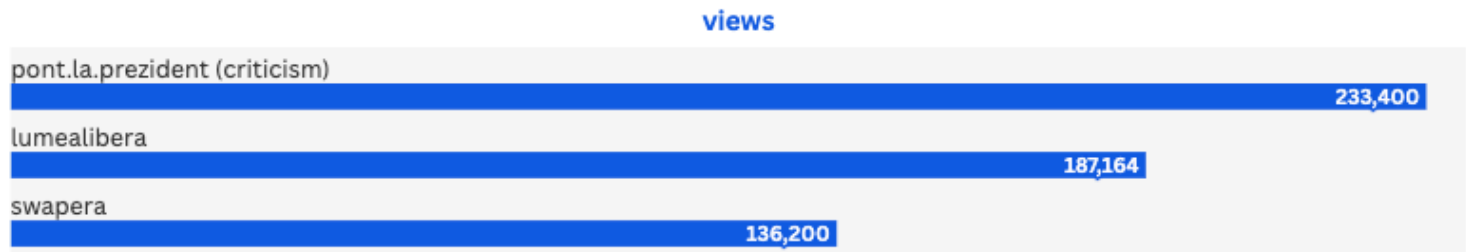
He is the only candidate in the sample analyzed to achieve such a level of visibility directly from his own account. We do not currently have enough data to determine whether this growth is exclusively organic (as we assume was the case with Elena Lasconi or George Simion after the presidential elections in November) or whether we are witnessing a coordinated amplification by inauthentic networks in these cases.

However, to put these figures into context, we note that in the last 30 days, candidate George Simion, with 1.3 million followers, has 7,073,766 views on his own content, while Nicușor Dan has 8,061,292 views on his own page.

Victor Ponta

Top Accounts Creating Inauthentic Videos

Last 30 days



Compared to other candidates analyzed, inauthentic promotion strategies such as impersonation, duplicate accounts, or dedicated support networks do not appear to be a central component of how candidate Victor Ponta is promoted on TikTok. Although a few such accounts have been identified, they have not achieved significant visibility or viral capacity comparable to the networks of other candidates.

The candidate is also visible through negative content that reinterprets or satirizes recent statements. A relevant example is the hashtag #puiemonta, which accumulated approximately 718,400 views between January and April 2025. The associated content often refers to: controversial statements about flooding Romanian villages to save Belgrade, Victor Ponta's time as prime minister, and associations with the Social Democratic Party (PSD).

Methodological notes

It is important to note that any social media monitoring reflects only a limited portion of the total volume of content available online. It is not feasible to analyze the entire universe of information distributed on a social network, which is why every monitoring exercise involves the adoption of relevance and selection indicators.

In this case, our priority was to identify and classify videos relevant to the 2025 election campaign, particularly those with over 10,000 views (with some justified exceptions). We chose to monitor video content rather than accounts as such, as on TikTok the popularity of a message is often determined by its momentary virality, not by the constant visibility of an account. Thus, unknown accounts can get hundreds of thousands of views for a single political video.

This approach brings with it many unknowns: from how the TikTok algorithm works to the difficulty of explaining the sudden virality of obscure satirical accounts that suddenly start massively distributing political content.

Based on the prioritization of videos as a measure of relevance, the analysis was constructed with as balanced coverage as possible across all candidates, covering the period January–April 2025, with a focus on the last 30 days. Visibility was correlated with the analysis of approximately 10 hashtags per candidate, including the candidate's name, position on the ballot, and calls to action (e.g., "vote," "support"). It is essential to note that the mere frequency of a hashtag does not automatically indicate the nature of the content (positive or negative), but only a first indicator of the volume of conversation.

About Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB)

A separate part of the analysis focused on identifying coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) in the election campaign.

Coordinated inauthentic behavior refers to the organized activity of a network of accounts, pages, or groups acting in a concerted manner to manipulate public opinion by misleading platforms or users about the identity, purpose, or popularity of the source. These operations are often designed to artificially promote certain messages, people, or narratives.

Taking the example of the [definition provided by Meta \(Facebook\)](#), CIB involves engaging in coordinated operations with a manipulative purpose, such as:

- Inauthentic Distribution: using a network of connected inauthentic accounts to distribute content with the aim of misleading the public about the popularity of that content.

- Inauthentic Audience Building: building an audience through inauthentic accounts that falsely suggest credibility or local origin.
- Foreign Inauthentic Behavior: foreign entities falsely presenting themselves as local voices with the aim of deceiving the audience.
- Inauthentic Engagement: generating fake interactions (likes, comments, redistributions) to suggest false popularity.
- Substantially Similar Deceptions: other sophisticated attempts to mislead about the purpose, origin, or impact of content.

It is essential to emphasize that this definition remains evolving, including at the international level. In particular, on the TikTok platform, it is difficult to distinguish real accounts of supporters who engage in repetitive, aggressive, or coordinated (spam-like) behavior from artificially constructed networks.

In this regard, the assessment also involved a manual verification process, focusing on elements such as graphic consistency, absence of personal content, and reuse of video material. At the same time, we note the need for more rigorous identity verification mechanisms on TikTok, as the mere existence of an email address is insufficient to guarantee the authenticity of an account producing viral political content.



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