



Echoes of the Alt-Right

U.S. disinformation in the 2025
Romanian Presidential Elections



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Disclaimer: The present paper aims to illustrate, in a non-exhaustive manner, findings related to suspected adversarial activities within the context of disinformation and FIMI. It is intended for informational purposes only. The views, analysis, and conclusions presented herein are solely those of the author(s) and do not constitute an endorsement of any stance or ideology. This paper does not aim to make any political statements or influence political opinions. The content is based on scholarly research and analysis of the topic at hand and should be interpreted as such. Readers should not construe the information presented as political commentary.

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Background: Institutional Crisis and the Erosion of Public Trust	3
Current Political and Economic Environment	5
United States and Russian Geopolitical Interests	6
The Disinformation Landscape in the Elections	7
Methodological Approach: Narrative Intelligence	9
Reconnaissance: Assessment of the Operational Environment	9
Acquisition: Data Harvesting and Narrative Extraction	9
Analysis: Classification and Threat Assessment	10
Disinformation Ecosystem: Narrative Clusters and Intersections	11
Data Overview	12
Grand Narratives	17
1. Suppression of Democracy in Romania	17
2. International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control	17
3. Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat	18
4. QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal	19
5. Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence	19
6. World War III Agenda	20
Intersections with Russian Narratives	20
Shared Anti-System and Sovereigntist Frames	21
Distinctive Features of Russian Disinformation	21
Evidence of Narrative Borrowing and Mutual Amplification	22
Divergence in Underlying Objectives and Target Audiences	23
Impact Assessment: Strategic Implications	24
Suppression of Democracy in Romania	24
Objective and Strategic Goals	24
Narrative Scope and Engagement	25
Geopolitical Implications	25
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	26
International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control	26
Objective and Strategic Goals	26
Narrative Scope and Engagement	26
Geopolitical Implications	27
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	27

Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat	27
Objective and Strategic Goals	27
Narrative Scope and Engagement	28
Geopolitical Implications	28
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	29
QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal	29
Objective and Strategic Goals	29
Narrative Scope and Engagement	29
Geopolitical Implications	30
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	30
Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence	30
Objective and Strategic Goals	30
Narrative Scope and Engagement	31
Geopolitical Implications	32
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	32
World War III Agenda	33
Objective and Strategic Goals	33
Narrative Scope and Engagement	33
Geopolitical Implications	33
Vulnerability and Impact on the Election	34
Recommendations: Strengthening Democratic Resilience	35
Youth, Peace, and Security	35
Civil Society	36
International Organizations	37
Conclusion: The American Alt-Right and Disinformation Ecosystem	39

Glossary

Term	Definition
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	The capability of computer systems to perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, like reasoning, perception, and decision-making. It involves developing systems that can analyse data and act to achieve goals.
Large Language Model (LLM)	A deep learning model trained on vast text data. It understands, generates, translates, and summarises human language using transformer networks, enabling applications like chatbots and content creation.
Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)	The practice of collecting and analysing publicly available information from sources like social media, news, and public records to produce actionable intelligence.
Digital Services Act (DSA)	The EU's Digital Services Act is a regulation for online intermediaries and platforms. It aims to create a safer digital space by tackling illegal content, ensuring user safety, protecting fundamental rights, and increasing transparency and accountability online.
Natural Language Processing (NLP)	A branch of artificial intelligence enabling computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language (text and speech). It combines computer science, linguistics, and machine learning to allow natural communication between humans and computers.
Disinformation	The spread of false or inaccurate information with the intent of deceiving or causing harm.
Misinformation	The spread of false or inaccurate information without the intent of deceiving or causing harm.
Malinformation	The spread of factual information, often shared out of context, with the intent of deceiving or causing harm.

Abstract

As Romania approaches the second round of its 2025 presidential elections, the political landscape is marked by unprecedented volatility, institutional distrust, and heightened exposure to coordinated disinformation. This report offers a comprehensive analysis of over 670 artefacts gathered across X and Telegram, using a hybrid methodology that integrates Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), Natural Language Processing (NLP), and Large Language Model-driven (LLM) classification to map disinformation narratives surrounding Romania's electoral process.

Six core narrative clusters dominate the landscape: **Suppression of Democracy, International Institutions as Mechanisms of Control, Globalist Conspiracy, QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal, Civil Society as Mechanisms of Influence, and the World War III Agenda.** These narratives are not isolated, but strategically connected within a broader metanarrative depicting Romania as a victim of elite-led subversion. The architecture of this disinformation system enables rapid adaptation to political events while reinforcing a cohesive worldview that undermines electoral legitimacy, weakens democratic institutions, and emboldens nationalist, anti-system actors.

These clusters achieve substantial engagement, particularly among digitally active and anti-establishment audiences. Spikes in narrative dissemination align closely with key political developments, such as the annulment ruling and the banning of Georgescu, underscoring the responsiveness and strategic precision of these campaigns.

The report also reveals a notable convergence between Russian and U.S. alt-right narratives. While not operationally coordinated, both ecosystems exploit similar themes, including anti-EU rhetoric, institutional delegitimisation, and sovereigntist framing, suggesting an emergent transnational synergy to destabilise pro-EU democratic governance.

In light of the growing sophistication of disinformation campaigns, the report proposes concrete, actor-specific responses: embedding media literacy into formal education to build digital resilience among youth; enhancing civil society's credibility through transparency and community-rooted engagement; and mobilising the Digital Services Act (DSA) to enforce platform accountability, and coordinated regulatory action across EU member states.

Background: Institutional Crisis and the Erosion of Public Trust

As Romania advances toward the decisive runoff of its 2025 presidential elections, the political environment is marked by historic volatility, deepening polarisation, and widespread public distrust. The elections follow a period of unprecedented institutional crisis: on December 6, 2024, Romania's Constitutional Court annulled the results of the previous presidential vote, citing classified intelligence that revealed extensive foreign interference. The intelligence reports detailed a coordinated campaign of social media manipulation, illicit campaign financing on TikTok, cyber-attacks, and suspected Russian involvement, particularly in favour of the ultranationalist candidate Călin Georgescu¹. The annulment not only upended the political calendar but also exposed systemic vulnerabilities in Romania's electoral infrastructure and catalysed a national debate about the integrity of democratic processes. In the aftermath, Georgescu, previously a marginal figure, was propelled into the national spotlight before being banned from running in the 2025 presidential race following the conclusion of the investigation in March².

The official campaign for the 2025 elections began on April 4, with the first round of voting held on May 4 and a runoff scheduled for May 18. Eleven candidates entered the race, representing a broad spectrum of political ideologies from hard-right nationalism to pro-European centrism. The campaign was shaped by the lingering effects of the annulled 2024 vote, ongoing concerns about foreign interference, and a profound crisis of public trust in state institutions. These dynamics were further amplified by the role of digital platforms, most notably X (formerly Twitter), Telegram, and TikTok, which served as key vectors for narrative manipulation and disinformation³. The European Commission, responding to the intelligence findings, issued new demands for transparency and data protection from these platforms, underscoring the international dimensions of Romania's electoral challenges.

¹ Lavinia Stan, "Why Romania's Election Was Annulled, and What Happens Next," *The Conversation*, March 25, 2025, <https://theconversation.com/why-romania-s-election-was-annulled-and-what-happens-next-245779>

² BBC News, "Romania Election Annulled: What It Means for the Country," *BBC*, March 25, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj679nk6endo>.

³ *European Digital Media Observatory* (EDMO), "Elections in EU Member States and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT)," 2025, <https://edmo.eu/thematic-areas/elections/elections-in-eu-member-states-and-overseas-countries-and-territories-oct/>.

First Round Results: May 4, 2025

The first round of the 2025 presidential election produced a clear but contentious outcome. George Simion, the *Alliance for the Union of Romanians* (AUR) leader, secured a commanding victory, receiving 3,862,405 votes, or 40.96% of the total. Simion's campaign, built on a foundation of populist nationalism, Euroscepticism, and opposition to military support for Ukraine, resonated strongly with younger voters and those in rural areas. His rhetoric, frequently invoking themes of sovereignty, anti-corruption, and resistance to foreign influence, was amplified by his endorsement from Călin Georgescu and extensive coverage in domestic and international alt-right media. Simion's rise is emblematic of a broader shift toward nationalist sentiment in Romanian politics, reflecting profound disillusionment with the traditional political establishment and growing scepticism of Romania's alignment with Brussels⁴.

Nicușor Dan, the independent mayor of Bucharest, finished second with 1,979,711 votes, or 20.99%, thereby qualifying for the runoff against Simion. Dan, a former leader of the *Save Romania Union* (USR), has positioned himself as a centrist reformer, emphasising transparency, anti-corruption, and governance reform. His support base is concentrated in urban centres and among the Romanian diaspora, and his campaign has sought to bridge the gap between established political institutions and a disillusioned electorate. Dan's candidacy has been bolstered in part by the endorsement of the USR leadership, who shifted their support to him in the final weeks of the campaign, fearing that a divided pro-European vote would leave the field open to two far-right candidates in the runoff⁵.

Crin Antonescu, representing the A.RO coalition (comprising the *Social Democratic Party*, *National Liberal Party*, and *Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania*), finished third with 1,892,925 votes, or 20.08%. Antonescu campaigned as the candidate of EU-aligned continuity, appealing to voters seeking institutional stability and continued integration with European and transatlantic structures. Despite polling competitively before the election, Antonescu narrowly missed advancing to the runoff, underscoring the fragmentation of the pro-European vote and the volatility of the current political landscape.

Elena Lasconi, president of the USR and mayor of Câmpulung, entered the 2025 race after finishing second in the annulled 2024 election with 19% of the vote. However, her 2025 campaign was marred by internal party conflict. In the weeks leading up to the first round,

⁴ Jacopo Barigazzi, "Romania's Election Scenarios: Data and Outcomes," *Politico Europe*, March 21, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/romanian-election-scenarios-data/>.

⁵ John Irish and Luiza Ilie, "Romanians to Vote in Presidential Test of Trump-Style Nationalism," Reuters, May 3, 2025, <https://reuters.com/world/europe/romanians-vote-presidential-test-trump-style-nationalism-2025-05-03>.

USR leadership withdrew official support for Lasconi and endorsed Nicușor Dan, fearing that a divided centrist vote would benefit Simion. Despite remaining the party's official candidate and mounting a legal challenge to restore her campaign funding, Lasconi's support collapsed; she ultimately finished in fifth place with around 5% of the vote. Lasconi's campaign focused on social justice, education, and healthcare, and she appealed particularly to women, rural voters, and young people. She has positioned herself as an independent voice against political backroom deals and remains a symbol of the challenges faced by reformist candidates in Romania's polarised environment⁶.

Victor Ponta, former prime minister and independent candidate, finished outside the top three, with pre-election polling placing his support between 9% and 23%. Ponta's campaign centred on a sovereigntist agenda, particularly emphasising the local economic impact of Ukrainian grain exports and the need for a more independent foreign policy. Despite his visibility and past political experience, Ponta failed to break through in a field dominated by Simion's nationalist surge and the centrist consolidation around Dan.

Current Political and Economic Environment

Romania's current political environment is shaped by a profound crisis of trust, exacerbated by the exposure of coordinated disinformation operations. Despite recent efforts by platforms such as X and Meta to dismantle networks violating content policies, disinformation continues to circulate widely, shaping electoral narratives and undermining public trust in democratic institutions. The 2024 election annulment, prompted by evidence of information manipulation and foreign interference, has left a lasting imprint in the eyes of the citizens, reinforcing anxieties about the legitimacy of the electoral process itself⁷.

At the core of the political debate lies a sharp ideological divide regarding Romania's positioning within Euro-Atlantic alliances. George Simion, leading the populist AUR party, promotes a sovereigntist vision that includes scaling back military support to Ukraine and questioning Brussels' influence over national decision-making. His rhetoric appeals to voters who are sceptical of Romania's current foreign policy direction. In contrast, Crin Antonescu, the candidate representing the pro-European A.R.O. coalition, advocates for continued integration with the EU and alignment with NATO, offering a platform of diplomatic continuity and international cooperation.

⁶ Paun, Carmen. "Romanian Presidential Candidate Fights Her Own Party to Stay in Election Race." POLITICO, April 17, 2025. <https://politico.eu/article/romania-presidential-election-candidate-elena-lasconi-fight-usr-party-stay-race>.

⁷ Wesolowsky, Tony. "It's Election Season in Romania. Here's Everything You Need to Know." *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, November 23, 2024. <https://www.rferl.org/a/romanian-parliamentary-presidential-elections-2024/33210762.html>.

Meanwhile, Nicușor Dan, the second major contender, positions himself as a centrist alternative and faces a decisive challenge: his prospects in the second round depend mainly on his ability to attract a substantial portion of Antonescu's pro-European supporters. Without the transfer of these votes, Dan's chances of overcoming the populist surge led by Simion would be minimal, making Antonescu's electorate a potential kingmaker bloc in the runoff. These opposing visions underscore deeper societal debates about identity, sovereignty, and strategic alignment.

Economically, the country faces a set of acute pressures, thus being a relevant part of the electoral discourse. Romania faces high inflation and economic inequality, significant budget deficits, and voters demanding fiscal stability and anti-corruption measures. The ongoing war in Ukraine further complicates the economic narrative, which influences foreign policy stances and military alliances. Candidates' positions on these issues are pivotal, as they seek to address both domestic economic challenges and broader geopolitical dynamics.

The constitutional court's annulment of the 2024 elections has left a lasting impact on public trust in Romania's democratic institutions. This decision, driven by allegations of foreign interference, underscored the fragility of electoral processes in the face of external manipulation. The annulment has amplified calls for robust measures to counter disinformation and ensure transparency, as the nation grapples with maintaining the integrity of its democratic systems⁸. Moreover, the annulment has fueled renewed allegations of corruption and oligarchic influence. Issues that, despite notable improvements in recent decades, remain highly salient and have been extensively leveraged as central themes throughout the political campaigns.

United States and Russian Geopolitical Interests

Geopolitical interests from both Russia and the Trump administration have significantly influenced the political dynamics. Russia's involvement has been primarily linked to supporting far-right candidates who align with its strategic interests in undermining EU cohesion, NATO's influence, and military support for Ukraine. Simion's anti-EU platform, combined with his opposition to military aid for Ukraine, aligns closely with Russian efforts to fracture Western solidarity and weaken regional support for Kyiv. His nationalist messaging taps into deep-rooted frustrations among groups of the electorate, creating fertile ground for Russian-influenced narratives to thrive⁹.

⁸ Wesolowsky, Tony. "It's Election Season in Romania. Here's Everything You Need to Know." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, November 23, 2024.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/romanian-parliamentary-presidential-elections-2024/33210762.html>.

⁹ "Elections in EU Member States and Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT) – EDMO," n.d. <https://edmo.eu/thematic-areas/elections/elections-in-eu-member-states-and-overseas-countries-and-territories-oct/>.

Meanwhile, actors linked to the Trump administration have demonstrated interest in Romanian candidates who mirror the ideological framework of "America First". Victor Ponta, campaigning under a "Romania First" banner, seeks to mobilise nationalist sentiment and economic sovereignty themes similar to Donald Trump's political strategy¹⁰. His emphasis on bilateralism over multilateral engagement aligns with the Trump administration's preference for reshaping global alliances to favour direct U.S. influence. Additionally, Ponta is not the only Romanian candidate aligned with U.S. alt-right views; George Simion has also declared himself a "natural ally" of Trump and has gained significant visibility within the U.S. alt-right infosphere and media¹¹. Simion's public alignment with Trump and MAGA rhetoric has been widely covered, and his nationalist, Eurosceptic stance has resonated strongly with far-right audiences both in Romania and abroad.

This ideological convergence between Romanian nationalist candidates and external backers reflects a broader attempt to redirect Romania's geopolitical orientation, potentially loosening its ties with the EU and shifting its strategic calculus toward bilateral alignments¹². Both Moscow and Trump-aligned actors perceive Romania's elections as a critical opportunity to weaken European unity, promote fragmentation, and tilt regional dynamics in their favour.

Given these overlapping pressures, the urgency to understand and counter foreign influence in Romania's democratic process has never been greater. This report aims to map the evolving disinformation landscape at a crucial juncture, offering timely insights into the actors, narratives, and strategies at play before they can reshape Romania's future and the broader balance of power in Eastern Europe.

The Disinformation Landscape in the Elections

Against the backdrop of the 2024 election annulment, triggered by intelligence reports of foreign interference and resulting in the exclusion of ultranationalist candidate Călin Georgescu, Romania's political environment has entered a phase of heightened vulnerability. This vulnerability has been rapidly exploited by adversarial actors in the information sphere, which blended genuine grievances with fabricated threats to foster polarisation, erode institutional trust, and reshape political imagination around a sovereigntist, anti-globalist axis.

¹⁰ McGrath, Stephen, and Nicolae Dumitrache. "Romania's Presidential Election Redo Is a High-stakes Test of Its Democracy Following Annulled Vote | AP News." AP News, April 19, 2025. <https://apnews.com/article/romania-election-presidency-europe-far-right-russia-baf335441276aa88859c010bc04da686>.

¹¹ Henley, Jon. "Romanians Vote in Election That Could Propel Ultranationalist Trump Ally to Power." The Guardian, May 4, 2025. <https://theguardian.com/world/2025/may/04/romania-election-ultranationalist-trump-ally-george-simion>.

¹² Giera, Max, Nicholas Vinocur, and Csongor Körömi. "Romanian Wild Card George Simion Sets Brussels' Nerves on Edge." POLITICO, May 15, 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/george-simion-romania-presidential-election-profile-ukraine>.

Understanding this discursive architecture is crucial for Romanian electoral resilience, as it reveals how adversarial actors use digital ecosystems to distort specific events and redefine the legitimacy of democratic governance.

Despite variations in tone and extremity, most disinformation narratives converge on a central logic: that Romania's sovereignty is under coordinated assault by foreign powers, supranational institutions, and domestic allies. Disinformation actors use emotionally charged language, cultural symbols, and international figures to legitimise and amplify their messaging, tailoring it to digitally active nationalist and anti-establishment audiences.

These narratives do not operate in isolation. They form a layered and adaptive metanarrative that positions Romania as the victim of coordinated external subversion by foreign powers, global secret cabals, and corrupted agents within the so-called "deep state", while presenting nationalist candidates as the only viable defenders of democratic sovereignty.

Methodological Approach: Narrative Intelligence

Narrative Intelligence is a methodology that intersects Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) with Natural Language Processing (NLP) to provide a data-first approach in exploring narratives from large corpora of texts. In Narrative Intelligence, a narrative is defined by a set of fundamental components (characters, setting, plot, conflict, themes, message, point of view) and enriched by contextual metadata to provide a predictable, consistent, and machine-readable structure to the data, enabling researchers to explore disinformation data with both a qualitative and quantitative approach. Furthermore, this approach is enriched by the use of AI tools, namely Large Language Models (LLMs), to conduct NLP transformations at scale, reducing time and complexity in conducting data extraction and data labelling operations.

The methodology is segmented into three sequential and interdependent phases: Reconnaissance, Acquisition, and Analysis.

Reconnaissance: Assessment of the Operational Environment

This stage emphasises identifying threat factors, actors, distribution channels, and dissemination methods. Priority is given to platforms with a demonstrable history of disinformation activity, such as X and Telegram, which are known for hosting alt-right and conspiratorial content.

By leveraging OSINT techniques, we identify, categorise, and track influential actors, including high-reach individuals and brands, coordinated inauthentic behaviour networks, and bot amplification infrastructures. This step employs digital footprinting and metadata analysis to trace interconnectivity and influence hierarchies within the alt-right disinformation ecosystem.

For the purpose of this report, we selected 55 actors on Telegram and 55 actors on X who were either (1) based in the US or (2) showed a consistent trend in the production of US-aligned content.

Acquisition: Data Harvesting and Narrative Extraction

This phase involves the scraping of artefacts, i.e. posts and messages, and the normalisation of the data to ensure consistency and integrity across diverse formats and sources.

To effectively scrape important artefacts, we set a minimum threshold for the number of views or interactions necessary to gauge the artefact's validity. This threshold varies based on the

account's reach and activity levels. The scraping is conducted by building a series of queries featuring common disinformation or misinformation keywords, enriched by the local context of the Romanian presidential elections. Data is collected via ethical means, ensuring full compliance with existing regulations on data protection and platform-specific terms of service. Only publicly available and accessible artefacts have been included in our datasets.

After acquisition, artefacts are manually filtered to ensure their content matches the definitions for misinformation (unintentional deception), disinformation (intentional deception), or malinformation (intentional disclosure). The resulting set is then parsed by performing NLP transformations on a LLM (*Gemini 2.5 Flash*) to identify and extract narratives, following a predefined schema that describes a narrative as follows:

- **Characters:** the agents within the narrative, typically people, organisations, nations, or inanimate objects anthropomorphised for the sake of the story.
- **Setting:** time and place, providing context for the story to unfold.
- **Plot:** the sequence of events that make up the story's structure.
- **Conflict:** the point of divergence, or problem, from which the story develops.
- **Themes:** the subjects explicitly or inherently mentioned in the story.
- **Message:** the moral of the story, or persuasion points, directed towards the reader.
- **Point of view:** the point of view of the narrator (first-person, second-person, third-person, fourth-person), which might incorporate invisible or impalpable biases.

Analysis: Classification and Threat Assessment

The third phase applies pattern recognition to assess the nature and the implications of the detected narratives. Narratives that share multiple components are identified and tagged as clusters, subject to subsequent review by analysts to confirm proper and coherent classification.

After narrative clusters are deemed coherent, they are provided a description and name, which will then be used to conduct automated labelling on the original posts and messages by means of LLM classification. Labelled posts and messages are sampled for quality control.

The resulting dataset is then investigated by mixing qualitative components, i.e. the narrative clusters, and quantitative metrics, e.g. views, replies, and interactions, in order to assess the scope, performance, and impact of the identified narratives.

Disinformation Ecosystem: Narrative Clusters and Intersections

This section presents the core findings from our mapping and analysis of disinformation narratives related to the 2025 Romanian presidential elections. Our investigation identified six dominant *narrative clusters* that together form the backbone of the U.S. alt-right disinformation ecosystem targeting Romania's electoral environment:

1. Suppression of Democracy in Romania
2. International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control
3. Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat
4. QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal
5. Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence
6. World War III Agenda

Each cluster encapsulates a distinct thematic line of attack, yet they do not function in isolation. Instead, they operate as interconnected components within a broader *metanarrative*, a layered and adaptive worldview in which Romania is depicted as the target of a coordinated assault by foreign elites, supranational institutions, and domestic collaborators. This metanarrative architecture enables disinformation actors to pivot fluidly between topics such as judicial corruption, foreign meddling, NGO manipulation, and NATO aggression, while reinforcing a consistent ideological message that Romania's sovereignty is under siege by a hostile, globally aligned system of control.

The *Suppression of Democracy* cluster is foundational, functioning as the entry point for most narratives. It constructs a storyline in which the annulment of the 2024 election and the banning of nationalist candidate Călin Georgescu are framed as illegitimate power grabs by the "deep state." From there, narratives often transition into the *International Institutions* cluster, positioning the EU, NATO, and the UN as authoritarian enforcers of foreign dominance. These are frequently linked to the *Civil Society* cluster, where NGOs and Soros-funded organisations are portrayed as domestic proxies for elite influence, actively working to censor dissent and manipulate legal outcomes. More extreme content then branches into the *Global Conspiracy*, *QAnon*, and *WW3 Agenda* clusters, which reframe the Romanian crisis as part of a cosmic or geopolitical battle between good and evil, often invoking spiritual warfare, nuclear conflict, or transhumanist elites.

Understanding these clusters and their intersections is essential to grasping how foreign and ideological actors exploit electoral vulnerabilities by spreading falsehoods and offering emotionally resonant, strategically coordinated alternatives to mainstream political discourse.

Data Overview

The dataset comprises 233 Telegram messages and 445 posts on X created between October 1, 2024, and April 30, 2025. In line with the behaviour observed in other informational incidents in the past, disinformation surrounding the 2024 and 2025 Romanian presidential elections are shown to be responsive to breaking events; notably, spikes of activity are especially significant around December 6 (annulment of the first round by the Constitutional Court) and March 9 (barring of then-presidential candidate Călin Georgescu).

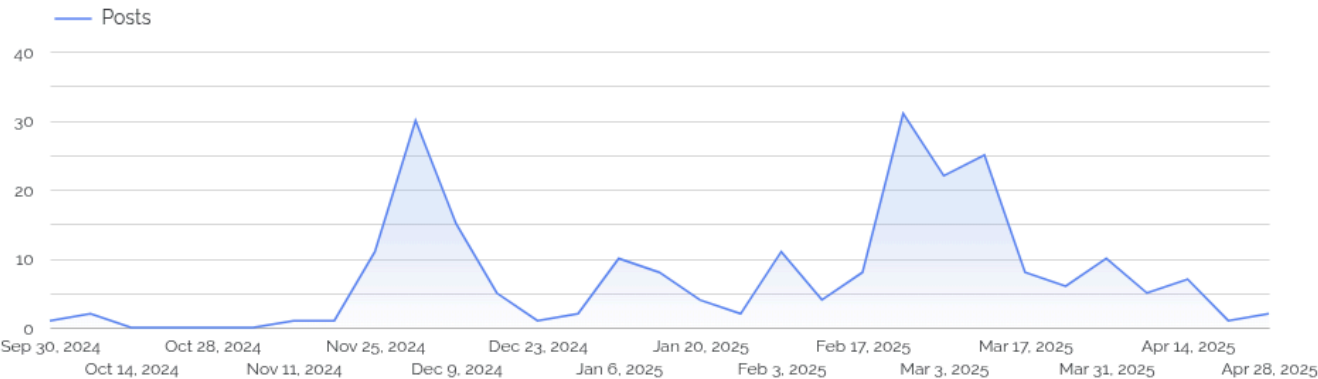


Fig. 1 - Distribution of messages on Telegram by posting date

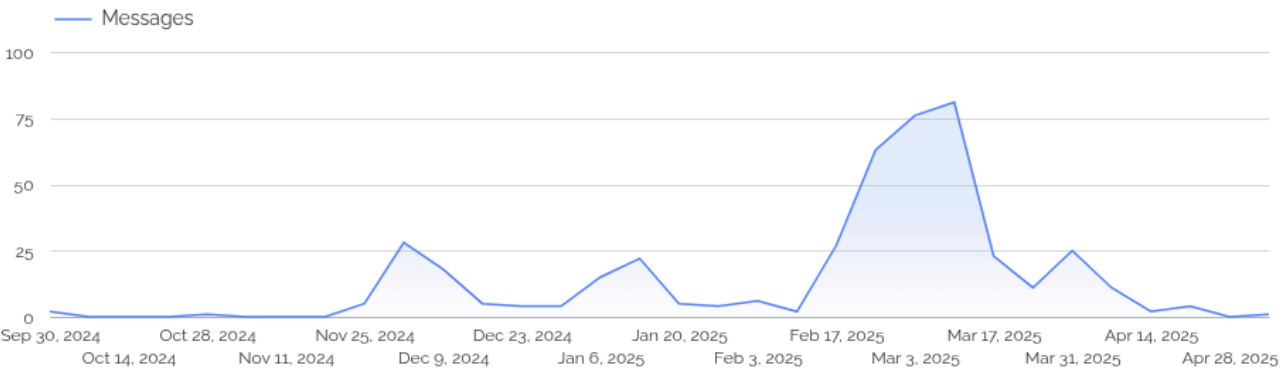


Fig. 2 - Distribution of posts on X by posting date

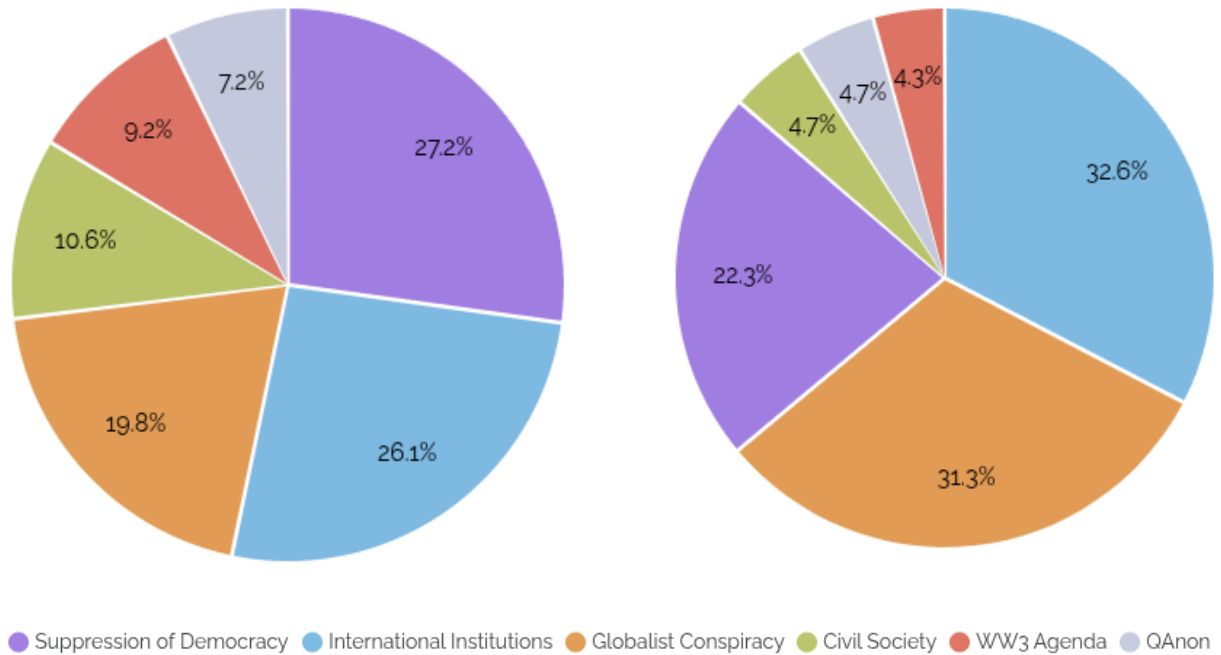


Fig. 3 - Distribution of artefacts (messages, posts) on X (left) and Telegram (right) by narrative

The artefacts' distribution and engagement metrics differ contingent on narrative and platform. This aligns with past observations on the differences between the audiences of X and Telegram regarding demographics and content consumption. While both platforms are widely adopted for news consumption, X is primarily used for public discourse and engagement, whilst Telegram focuses on breaking events and producing or amplifying existing content.

These differences can be further explored by analysing the performance of each narrative on the respective platforms, subject to the availability of metrics specific to the platform itself. Some notable differences include the bigger volume of QAnon-related content on Telegram compared to X, a higher engagement for the *International Institutions*, *Globalist Conspiracy*, and *Civil Society* narratives on X compared to other narratives (top right quadrant of Fig. 4), and the observation that none of the narratives on Telegram managed to perform above average on both forwards and interactions (top right quadrant of Fig. 5).

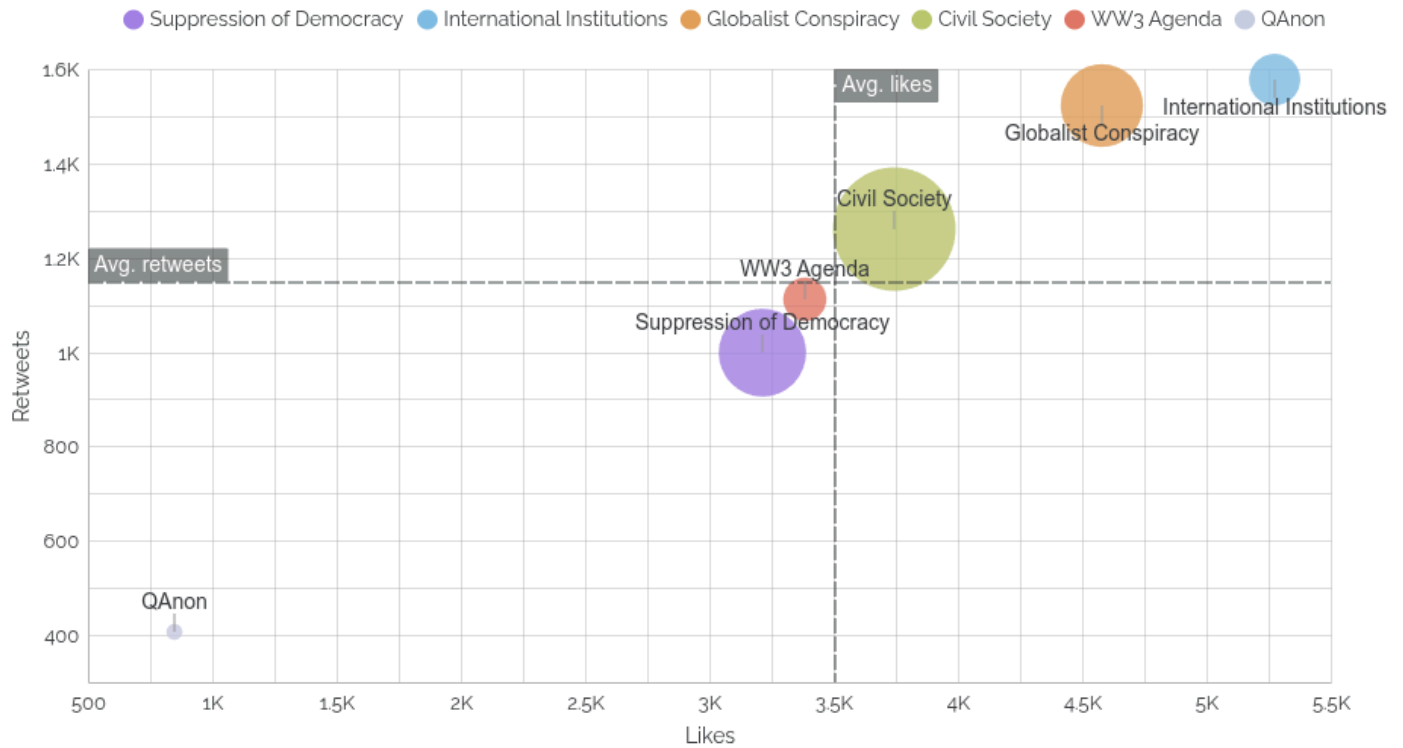


Fig. 4 - Engagement rate (X: Avg Likes, Y: Avg Retweets, Size: Avg Views) of narratives on X

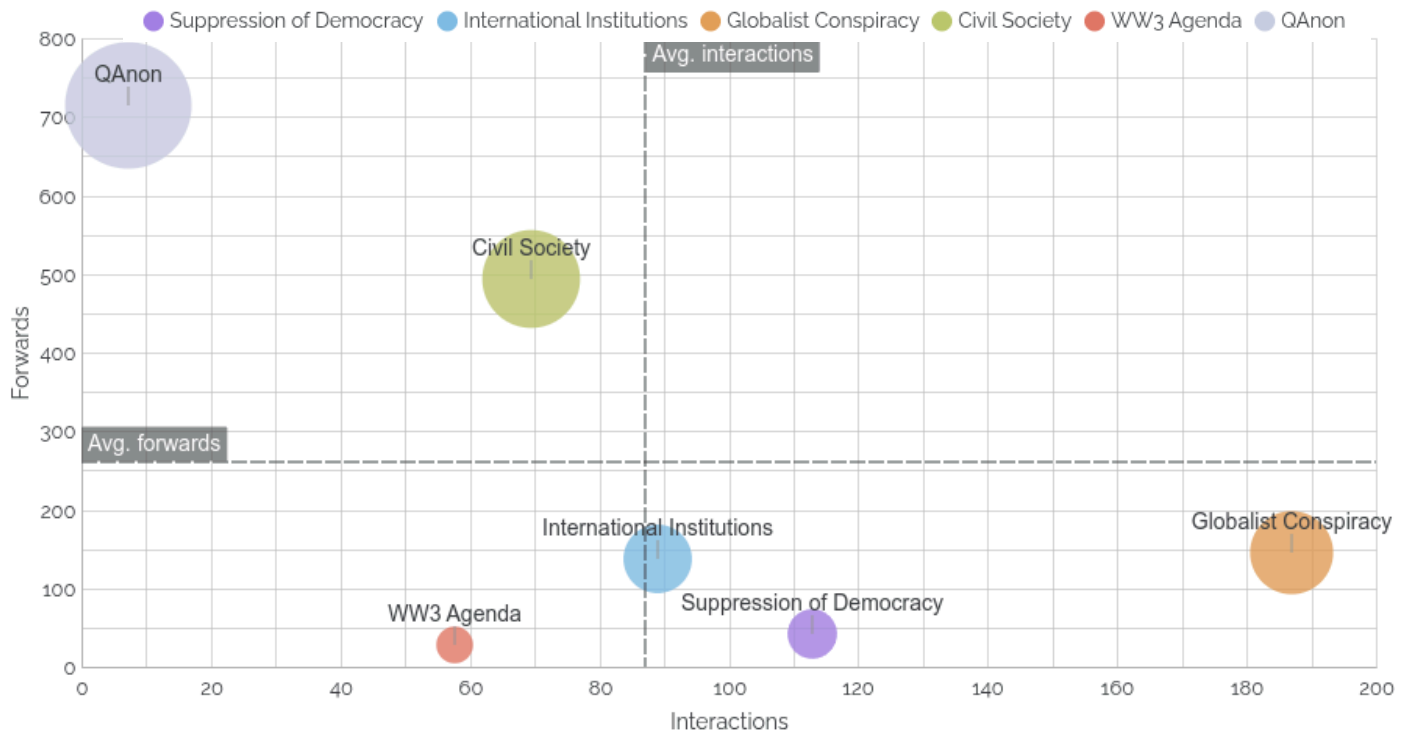


Fig. 5 - Engagement rate (X: Avg Interactions, Y: Avg Forwards, Size: Avg Views) of narratives on Telegram

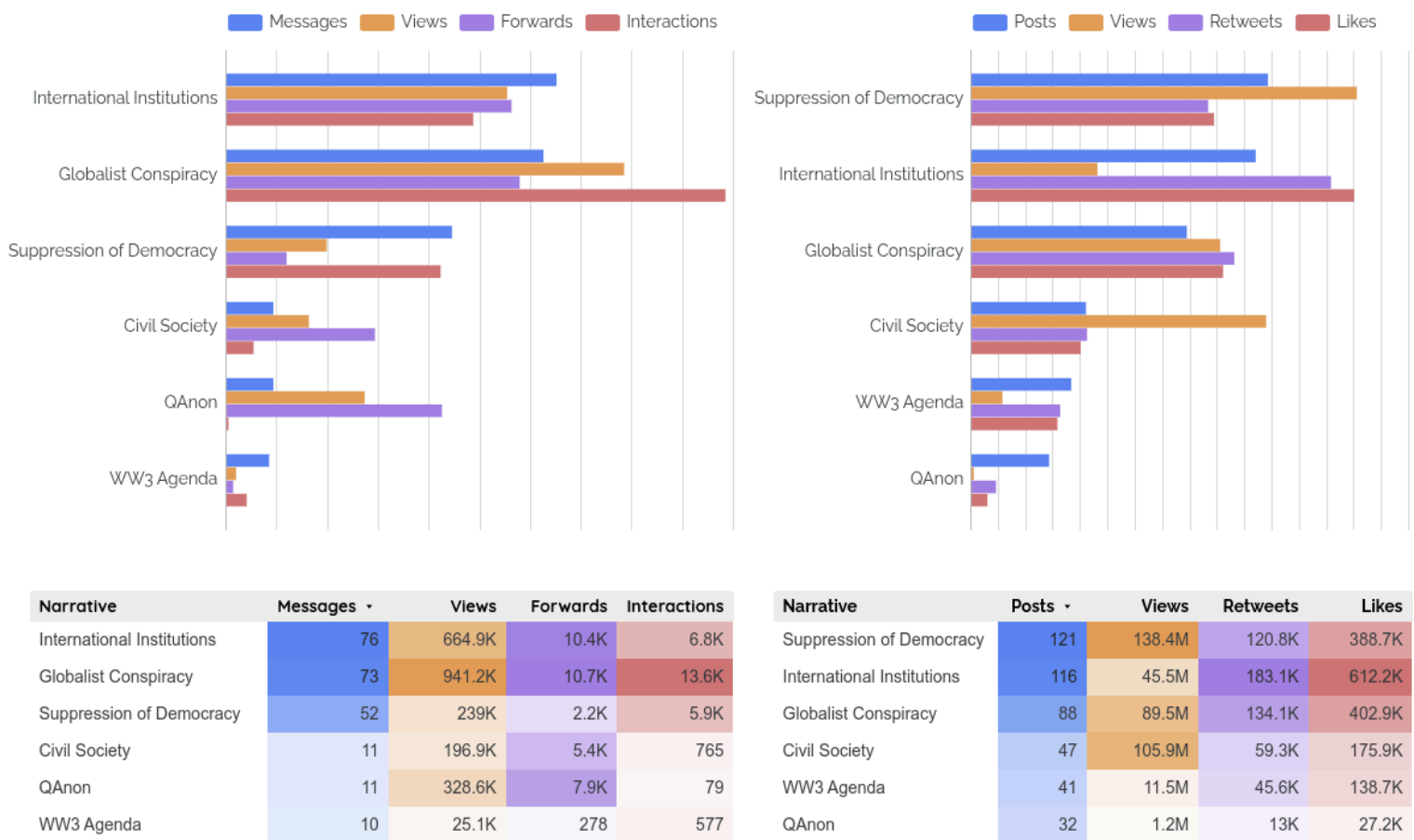


Fig. 6 - Total engagement volume for each narrative on Telegram (left) and X (right)

Looking at absolute numbers (Fig. 6), it is evident that *International Institutions*, *Suppression of Democracy* and *Globalist Conspiracy* score in the top 3 of both platforms, yet with some significant differences: views and interactions are highest for *Global Conspiracy* content on Telegram on almost par number of messages with *International Institutions*, while users on X interacted mostly with *International Institutions* content in terms of likes and retweets, despite scoring only 4th in terms of absolute number of views.

Notably, content related to *Civil Society* on X attracted the second highest number of views, despite its volume of messages being ~2.5 times less than that of *Suppression of Democracy* and *International Institutions*. Messages spreading QAnon claims on Telegram, on the other hand, display a significant volume of views and forwards, whilst interactions are almost non-existent. This suggests potential bot activity, further supported by the observation that

many of the messages scraped for this dataset have been subsequently deleted at a later date by the authors.

The distribution of topics mentioned or alluded to within the artefacts (Fig. 7) is overall consistent on both platforms. *Globalist*, *Ukraine* and *Pedophilia* were found to be more recurrent on Telegram, compatible with the assumption of a broader presence of Kremlin-aligned and QAnon channels on the platform; conversely, *European Union*, *United States of America*, *NATO*, *Free Speech*, and *Donald Trump* were found to be more recurrent on X, presumably due to the higher concentration of US-based users on the platform.

Topic	Share ▾	Topic	Share ▾
1. Romania	23.16%	1. Romania	23.27%
2. Calin Georgescu	14.88%	2. Calin Georgescu	13.39%
3. Globalist	11.16%	3. European Union	8.8%
4. Ukraine	7.35%	4. United States of America	5.83%
5. Deep State	6.23%	5. Deep State	5.72%
6. United States of America	5.58%	6. NATO	5.51%
7. European Union	4.65%	7. Globalist	5.18%
8. United Nations	3.63%	8. Russia	4.05%
9. Russia	3.63%	9. Donald Trump	3.89%
10. Pedophilia	2.88%	10. Free speech	2.97%
11. Germany	2.79%	11. George Soros	2.75%
12. Oligarchy	2.6%	12. Ukraine	2.65%
13. NATO	2.51%	13. United Nations	2.43%
14. Donald Trump	1.95%	14. Oligarchy	2.05%
15. NGOs	1.86%	15. Germany	1.94%
16. George Soros	1.86%	16. Pedophilia	1.94%
17. World Economic Forum	1.12%	17. NGOs	1.62%
18. France	1.02%	18. France	1.51%
19. World War 3	0.56%	19. World War 3	1.19%
20. George Simion	0.37%	20. George Simion	0.97%

Fig. 7 - Distribution of topics mentioned or alluded to on Telegram (left) and X (right)

Grand Narratives

1. Suppression of Democracy in Romania

The most prominent cluster centres on the suppression of democracy, particularly the annulment of the 2024 Romanian presidential elections and the disqualification of nationalist candidate Călin Georgescu. These narratives depict Georgescu as the legitimate winner, presenting his exclusion as an orchestrated act of suppression by a so-called “Deep State” operating within Romania’s own institutions and under the influence of foreign actors. The Constitutional Court, Central Electoral Bureau, and Romanian intelligence services (SRI) are consistently portrayed as instruments of elite manipulation, accused of executing a “coup d’état” or “rigged system” to remove a popular nationalist figure from the political arena. The language is highly charged, with frequent references to “illegitimate power grabs,” “authoritarian takeovers,” and “test cases” for similar actions across Europe. Several narratives escalate beyond procedural irregularities, describing house raids, police brutality, and judicial persecution as evidence of a broader campaign to silence opposition and intimidate voters.

This cluster also recurrently implicates external actors, particularly the European Union and Brussels-based officials, as orchestrators or enablers of Romania’s democratic backsliding. Some entries frame the judiciary’s actions, such as the annulment of the election or the banning and arrest of Georgescu, as directives from Brussels, designed to set a precedent for the suppression of nationalist movements elsewhere. The narrative frequently invokes warnings from both Romanian and international voices, including political scientists and foreign politicians, who characterise these events as a “Deep State coup” or a “Soviet-style Euro coup.” Additional stories highlight the alleged involvement of intelligence services in blocking candidates, the manipulation of voter rolls, and the weaponisation of legal instruments to ensure the dominance of pro-European or establishment interests. The result is a persistent storyline in which the will of the Romanian electorate is systematically overridden by corrupt elites, both domestic and foreign, casting doubt on the legitimacy of the entire electoral process and reinforcing the perception that democracy in Romania is under existential threat.

2. International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control

A second major thematic group depicts international organisations as key agents in undermining Romanian democratic sovereignty. These include repeated accusations against the EU, NATO, and UN, described as “foreign occupiers” or enforcers of an illegitimate supranational order. A significant number of these texts refer to a strategy of lawfare, namely

the weaponisation of legal instruments to suppress dissent, highlighted through references to the banning of candidates, prosecution of supporters, or reinterpretation of electoral laws.

What distinguishes this cluster is the way it reframes democratic mechanisms, such as elections, courts, and media regulators as tools of external domination. Institutions such as the EU Commission, the UN, and NATO are not portrayed as protectors of democratic norms, but as the architects of a neo-imperial order designed to subjugate Romania politically, economically, and culturally. The banning of Călin Georgescu is often cited as the prime example of this control strategy, positioned as a politically motivated decision orchestrated by Brussels and enforced through compliant domestic institutions. This cluster further emphasises the power asymmetry between Romania and the West, suggesting that democratic processes are flawed and fundamentally held hostage by a transnational elite that punishes national sovereignty.

These narratives are particularly potent because they do not rely solely on falsehoods but amplify legitimate public concerns about the perceived overreach of EU institutions, Romania's subordinated geopolitical role, and the uneven application of European standards. By weaving these anxieties into a conspiratorial frame, the cluster constructs an emotionally resonant story in which Romania is cast as a victim of global manipulation, and nationalist actors emerge as the only viable defenders of the nation's autonomy. This framing not only fosters Euroscepticism but also feeds into broader anti-globalist sentiment.

3. Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat

A third recurrent theme engages with broader conspiratorial framings, often elevating Romania's political events to the level of an international struggle against global elites. These stories frequently describe a "new world order" or "globalist tyranny", allegedly driven by actors such as George Soros, the World Economic Forum, or unnamed "puppet masters." Mentions of "satanic elites," "oligarchic networks," or "Luciferian forces" are present in at least five of these entries, shifting the narrative from political opposition to ideological or even spiritual warfare. While less frequent, such narratives amplify the dramatic tone of the overall discourse and function as a rhetorical bridge connecting Romania's internal dynamics to global events, including comparisons to the U.S. electoral system and references to Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, and Elon Musk.

Moreover, the repeated invocation of globally recognised figures, including Donald Trump, Matteo Salvini, J.D. Vance, and Elon Musk, indicates an effort to legitimise and amplify these narratives by aligning them with a broader ideological opposition to liberal internationalism.

These citations position Romania's internal disputes as emblematic of a larger confrontation between national sovereignty and transnational governance.

4. QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal

The QAnon cluster, though limited in volume, represents one of the most ideologically extreme and emotionally charged strands of disinformation in the Romanian electoral landscape. These narratives build on global QAnon notions, alleging the existence of a satanic elite engaged in child trafficking and global domination, and localise them around Romanian figures. Călin Georgescu is framed as a messianic truth-teller, banned not for legal reasons, but to prevent him from exposing these crimes. Mentions of George Soros, the Rothschilds, Klaus Schwab, the United Nations, and the World Economic Forum are common, positioning Romania as a frontline in a global spiritual and political war.

While QAnon narratives intersect with broader clusters like *Globalist Conspiracy* and *Suppression of Democracy*, they go further by framing the 2025 election not just as rigged or manipulated, but as a cosmic battle between good and evil. This rhetoric radicalises public discourse, mobilising fringe and anti-system voters through fear and paranoia. Ever since its emergence back in 2017, the QAnon community has incited and committed multiple acts of violence¹³, of which the most notable example is tied to the assault on Capitol Hill on January 6th, 2021¹⁴. Though numerically smaller, the QAnon cluster poses a significant risk: it amplifies distrust in all institutions, fuels polarisation, and fosters conditions where conspiracy thinking can substitute democratic engagement.

5. Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence

A notable cluster of disinformation narratives centres on the delegitimisation of Romanian civil society actors, particularly NGOs and activist groups, which are portrayed as covert instruments of foreign control and elite manipulation. These narratives frame civil society not as a democratic pillar but as an extension of globalist influence, allegedly working to subvert national sovereignty, censor dissenting voices, and shape electoral outcomes. A recurrent theme involves George Soros and his associated foundations, which are accused of financing Romanian NGOs to influence court decisions, sway public opinion, and infiltrate institutions under the guise of democratic development or human rights advocacy.

¹³ "QAnon Offenders in the United States | START.umd.edu," <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/qanon-offenders-united-states>.

¹⁴ "Into the Q Storm : Uncovering the Narrative of QAnon - University of Twente Student Theses," <https://essay.utwente.nl/86475/>.

These disinformation texts often employ emotionally charged and conspiratorial language, referring to NGOs as “Soros puppets,” “foreign agents,” or “domestic traitors,” and suggesting that these entities operate in coordination with supranational organisations such as the EU or NATO. In more extreme cases, civil society is accused of facilitating “ideological brainwashing” through media and educational channels, or of deploying “digital censorship” to suppress nationalist and conservative voices online. A particular emphasis is placed on NGO involvement in judicial processes, with claims that these groups manipulate the judiciary to disqualify candidates like Călin Georgescu or persecute political dissidents.

6. World War III Agenda

Another significant cluster identified in at least five distinct narratives centres on the so-called “WWIII Agenda,” which frames the 2025 Romanian presidential elections within the context of an imminent global conflict allegedly orchestrated by NATO, the European Union, and “globalist” or “liberal” actors. These narratives, propagated by U.S. alt-right influencers and their Romanian amplifiers, seek to portray Romania as a pawn in a broader geopolitical strategy to provoke war with Russia. Prominent among these is the claim that NATO intends to use Romania as a trigger point for World War III, with nationalist candidate Călin Georgescu depicted as a whistleblower warning the public about Western plans for escalation. The narrative further alleges that the EU Commission is not only complicit in this agenda but also actively interfering in the democratic processes of both Romania and Germany, thus undermining national sovereignty and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes.

These pieces of disinformation frequently invoke emotionally charged and conspiratorial language, referencing “globalist plots,” “deep state coups,” and imminent military interventions. Figures such as Alex Jones are cited as authoritative sources exposing these alleged conspiracies, with claims that a hidden elite is orchestrating chaos and destabilisation across Syria, Georgia, and Romania specifically to prevent the election of anti-establishment leaders, notably Donald Trump in the United States and nationalist candidates Georgescu and Simion in Romania. The narratives often escalate to assertions that NATO has already conducted a coup in Romania and is preparing the new government to invoke Article 5, thereby providing a pretext for open conflict with Russia.

Intersections with Russian Narratives

A comparison of the U.S. alt-right and Russian disinformation ecosystems targeting the 2025 Romanian presidential elections reveals convergent themes and distinct operational logics. The available evidence suggests that while there is significant narrative overlap, particularly regarding anti-system sentiment, anti-EU and NATO rhetoric, and the delegitimisation of

democratic institutions; the origins, objectives, and methods of narrative construction diverge in several key respects.

Shared Anti-System and Sovereigntist Frames

Both American alt-right and Russian disinformation campaigns have systematically amplified narratives centred on the suppression of democracy, the delegitimisation of the Romanian state, the role of international institutions as mechanisms of control and the portrayal of Romania as a victim of external manipulation. Russian and U.S. alt-right actors alike have promoted the idea that the annulment of the 2024 election and the exclusion of Călin Georgescu represent a “coup” orchestrated by corrupt elites, frequently invoking the “deep state” and “globalist mafia” as antagonists. These frames are reinforced through emotionally charged language, appeals to sovereignty, and the invocation of national betrayal, which are consistently echoed across both U.S. alt-right and Russian-aligned Telegram channels and online media¹⁵.

The vilification of international institutions, mainly the EU, NATO, and the UN, as mechanisms of foreign control is also a prominent feature of both ecosystems. Russian state-backed outlets (Sputnik, RT, the Pravda network) and U.S. alt-right influencers converge on the narrative that Brussels and EU “globalists” are subverting Romanian sovereignty, using legal and informational “lawfare” to suppress nationalist movements and enforce compliance with Western geopolitical objectives¹⁶.

Distinctive Features of Russian Disinformation

Despite this convergence, Russian disinformation in Romania is characterised by a nation-specific, adaptive approach. As documented in multiple studies, Russian propaganda does not seek to “sell” Russia as an alternative system but rather to exploit local grievances and inflame existing divisions. In the Romanian context, Russian narratives have focused on amplifying anti-NATO sentiment, portraying Romania as a “NATO outpost” and a direct security risk to Russia due to its hosting of missile defence infrastructure and participation in Black Sea military exercises. Importantly, anti-NATO narratives are also a prominent feature of U.S. alt-right disinformation, which frequently portrays the Alliance as an aggressor and a tool of “globalist” or “deep state” interests, allegedly manipulating Romania into confrontation with Russia and undermining its sovereignty. Both ecosystems leverage and reinforce suspicions about NATO’s intentions, though the American alt-right tends to integrate these claims into

¹⁵ “End of Democracy: How Pro-Russian Telegram Channels Influence Romanian Elections,” n.d. <https://openminds.ltd/reports/end-of-democracy-how-pro-russian-telegram-channels-influence-romanian-elections>.

¹⁶ “KOMANDA KREMLIN: The Russian Machine Behind Călin Georgescu – EDMO,” n.d. <https://edmo.eu/publications/komanda-kremlin-the-russian-machine-behind-calin-georgescu/>.

broader transnational conspiracy frameworks such as *Globalist Conspiracy* or the *World War III Agenda*, while Russian messaging is more explicitly anchored in regional security dynamics.

Russian messaging has also specifically targeted the issue of Moldova and the spectre of Romanian irredentism, warning of a “Romanian annexation of Moldova” and invoking the defence of Russian-speaking minorities in the region. This remains a uniquely Russian pressure point, largely absent from U.S. alt-right discourse, and reflects Moscow’s broader strategic interests in the Black Sea and post-Soviet space¹⁷.

A further distinction lies in the operational ecosystem. Russian-backed operations such as “Portal Kombat” leverage a coordinated network of websites and Telegram channels to systematically amplify pro-Kremlin and anti-EU content, often in multiple languages and across borders. These networks are designed to create echo chambers and “launder” Kremlin-originated narratives through seemingly local or neutral actors. The U.S. alt-right ecosystem, while also networked, is more decentralised and relies heavily on influencer amplification and the viral logic of Western social media platforms¹⁸.

Another notable difference concerns Russia’s practice of jointly deploying cyber warfare measures together with disinformation campaigns. Russian actors, including the pro-Russian hacking group *NoName057*, targeted the elections with coordinated DDoS attacks against the Romanian government and candidate websites on election day¹⁹, aiming to disrupt access and sow doubt about institutional reliability.

Evidence of Narrative Borrowing and Mutual Amplification

There is observable evidence of mutual reinforcement between Russian and U.S. alt-right narratives, particularly regarding the portrayal of Romania as a “dictatorship,” the use of “deep state” rhetoric, and the framing of the annulment as a Western-backed coup. Russian-language Telegram channels and media frequently cite Western alt-right influencers (e.g., Tucker Carlson, Alex Jones), while U.S. alt-right actors occasionally amplify Russian-origin content, especially when it aligns with anti-EU or anti-globalist themes²⁰.

¹⁷ Contributor, Robert Cr Swanson Former. “Two Case Studies of Russian Propaganda in Romania and Hungary — THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW.” THE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS REVIEW, September 19, 2020. <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/64q7lshepy1awksqtiyvj3bsqfipw0>.

¹⁸ “KOMANDA KREMLIN: The Russian Machine Behind Călin Georgescu – EDMO,” n.d. <https://edmo.eu/publications/komanda-kremlin-the-russian-machine-behind-calin-georgescu/>.

¹⁹ Redacția. “UPDATE Gruparea De Hackeri Ruși NoName057 Revendică Oficial Atacul Asupra Site-urilor Din România, În Ziua Alegerilor Prezidențiale.” TechRider.ro, May 4, 2025. <https://techrider.ro/cybersecurity/update-gruparea-de-hackeri-rusi-noname057-revendica-oficial-atacul-asupra-site-urilor-din-romania-in-ziua-alegerilor-prezidentiale/>.

²⁰ “End of Democracy: How Pro-Russian Telegram Channels Influence Romanian Elections,” n.d. <https://openminds.ltd/reports/end-of-democracy-how-pro-russian-telegram-channels-influence-romanian-elections>.

However, it bears emphasising that direct coordination remains unproven. The most likely assessment is that Russian and U.S. alt-right actors operate in parallel, exploiting the same informational vulnerabilities and occasionally amplifying one another's content, but not engaging in systematic joint operations. The convergence is best explained by shared strategic interests, namely, the destabilisation of pro-EU governance in Romania and the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions, rather than by direct collaboration.

Divergence in Underlying Objectives and Target Audiences

Russian disinformation is primarily focused on advancing Moscow's strategic interests in the Black Sea, undermining NATO cohesion, and containing EU influence in Romania and the broader region. Its messaging is tailored to local and regional security dynamics, and it frequently references Romania's role in NATO military infrastructure and its relations with Moldova²¹.

By contrast, U.S. alt-right narratives are more ideologically driven, seeking to globalise anti-liberal, anti-globalist sentiment and to position Romania as a frontline in a broader struggle against "woke" or "deep state" elites. The U.S. alt-right's engagement is less about regional security and more about embedding Romania's political crisis within a transnational populist imaginary.

Russian and U.S. alt-right disinformation ecosystems, while operating independently, have converged on similar themes and objectives in the Romanian electoral context. Both networks have prioritised the amplification of anti-system, anti-EU, and anti-NATO narratives. This alignment reflects a broader trend in which transnational disinformation campaigns, regardless of origin, exploit shared grievances to undermine democratic processes and promote illiberal, sovereigntist alternatives.

The emergence of a robust U.S. alt-right disinformation apparatus, now increasingly aligned with the narratives and interests of the current American administration, signals a new and evolving threat to democratic resilience not only in Romania but across Europe and globally. The normalisation of such narratives, especially when they possibly receive covert support from influential actors in established democracies, further erodes institutional trust and emboldens anti-democratic movements. This underscores the urgent need for sustained vigilance, cross-border cooperation, and comprehensive strategies to defend the integrity of democratic institutions against coordinated, multifaceted disinformation threats.

²¹ "End of Democracy: How Pro-Russian Telegram Channels Influence Romanian Elections," n.d.
<https://openminds.ltd/reports/end-of-democracy-how-pro-russian-telegram-channels-influence-romanian-elections>.

Impact Assessment: Strategic Implications

This section evaluates the strategic, societal, and electoral impacts of the disinformation narratives identified in our investigation. Drawing from a dataset of over 670 posts across X and Telegram, and six core narrative clusters, the impact assessment aims to map not only the scale and reach of disinformation but also its capacity to alter public perception, distort democratic participation, and undermine institutional trust. Each narrative cluster, whether portraying the EU as an occupier, civil society as a foreign agent, or the Romanian judiciary as complicit in a “deep state” conspiracy, operates with specific strategic intent and targets particular segments of the Romanian electorate.

Disinformation in this context is not accidental or chaotic; it is systematic, highly coordinated, and ideologically driven. It blends localised political grievances with transnational ideological framings, many of them rooted in U.S. alt-right ecosystems, and it adapts in real time to changing political events. The result is a high-impact narrative environment where trust in core democratic institutions is eroded, participation in legitimate political processes is discouraged, and support for anti-system, nationalist actors is actively cultivated. These effects are measurable both in terms of content virality (views, shares, forwards) and in terms of shifting public sentiment, particularly among vulnerable demographics.

The impact of these narratives is amplified by the absence of rapid and coordinated countermeasures and by the strategic use of alternative platforms like Telegram and fringe media ecosystems, which serve as incubators for radical content before it enters more mainstream spaces. This section dissects each cluster by its narrative content, strategic objectives, target audiences, and potential consequences for electoral integrity and national security. Through this lens, we assess how disinformation operates as a tool of influence and disruption in the Romanian 2025 electoral cycle.

Suppression of Democracy in Romania

Objective and Strategic Goals

Disinformation narratives within this cluster are constructed to depict Romania’s democratic institutions, including the Constitutional Court, Central Electoral Bureau, and intelligence services, as entities thoroughly infiltrated and manipulated by so-called “deep state” operatives and foreign actors. These stories often allege that key judicial and electoral decisions, such as the annulment of the 2024 presidential election and the exclusion of nationalist candidate Călin Georgescu, were not the result of impartial legal processes but

rather the outcome of coordinated interventions by Brussels-based officials or Western intelligence agencies. The narratives assert that these institutions operate under external directives, systematically undermining the sovereignty of the Romanian electorate. The strategic objective of this cluster is to delegitimise the democratic process, erode citizens' faith in the rule of law, and create a perception that the electoral outcome is predetermined by corrupt elites rather than by the will of the people.

Particular emphasis is placed on the Constitutional Court's ruling, which is described as pre-scripted to favour pro-European or establishment interests, and on the Central Electoral Bureau's purported manipulation of voter rolls and ballot counts. Intelligence services are characterised as agents of foreign surveillance, tasked with suppressing nationalist dissent through targeted investigations and media leaks. By framing these developments as deliberate, orchestrated attacks on democratic choice, the narratives aim to convince voters that genuine political competition is impossible under the current system. This targeted messaging is designed to galvanise support for candidates like George Simion while casting pro-European or centrist figures as complicit in a broader transnational conspiracy against Romanian democracy.

Narrative Scope and Engagement

This cluster accounted for 173 distinct posts across X and Telegram, representing approximately 27.2% of all posts on X and 22.3% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated over 138 million views, 338,700+ likes, and 120,800+ retweets on X alone. On Telegram, related messages accumulated more than 239,000 views and 2,200 forwards, underscoring sustained engagement among Romanian and international alt-right audiences. The narratives consistently employ emotionally charged language such as "deep state coup," "rigged system," and "authoritarian takeover," and frequently depict Romania's Constitutional Court, intelligence services, and electoral authorities as instruments of external manipulation or domestic subversion. The periods where engagement is at its highest correspond with the December 2024 election annulment and subsequent judicial rulings, with notable amplification by channels including *gatewaypunditofficial*, *onesquadundergod*, and Romanian nationalist Telegram groups. These platforms have proven instrumental in both originating and recycling core themes, ensuring that the narrative of democratic suppression remains highly visible and persistent across both mainstream and alternative information environments.

Geopolitical Implications

The deliberate framing of Romania's democratic crisis as a test case for broader authoritarian trends in Europe aligns with the interests of both Russian and U.S. alt-right actors. By

suggesting that the annulment of elections and disqualification of candidates could be replicated elsewhere, these narratives seek to undermine confidence in democratic processes across the region. The explicit linkage of Romanian events to Western “deep state” operations and EU interference provides a rhetorical bridge for international audiences, fostering transnational solidarity among anti-establishment movements and fueling Euroscepticism. The ultimate aim is to weaken the legitimacy of pro-European governance, disrupt Romania’s alignment with Western institutions, and embolden similar narratives in neighbouring countries.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

The “Suppression of Democracy” cluster most likely aims to target voters who are already sceptical of the political establishment, including rural populations, younger demographics active on X and Telegram, and those with nationalist or anti-globalist leanings. By framing Georgescu’s disqualification and the election’s annulment as evidence of a corrupt, unaccountable elite, these narratives deepen political polarisation and foster disengagement among pro-democracy voters. The risk is twofold: first, it demobilises turnout among mainstream and centrist constituencies; second, it consolidates and energises support for nationalist, anti-system candidates such as George Simion. The proliferation of these narratives can significantly distort the electoral playing field, undermine institutional trust, and contribute to a longer-term erosion of democratic resilience in Romania.

International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control

Objective and Strategic Goals

Disinformation narratives targeting international institutions, particularly the European Union, NATO, and the European Court of Human Rights, are designed to frame these entities as undemocratic, authoritarian, and hostile to national sovereignty. Within the Romanian electoral context, these narratives serve to delegitimise pro-European candidates such as Crin Antonescu and Elena Lasconi, while reinforcing the political capital of nationalist actors like George Simion. The strategic objective is clear: erode public trust in supranational bodies and shift political allegiance toward anti-establishment, sovereigntist candidates who reject multilateral governance frameworks.

Narrative Scope and Engagement

This cluster accounted for 192 distinct posts across X and Telegram, representing approximately 26.1% of all posts on X and 32.6% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated approximately 45.5 million views, 612.000 likes, and 183.000 retweets on X alone.

Telegram mirrored this influence, with 664.900 views and over 10.000 forwards, signalling significant engagement among Romanian and international alt-right audiences. These narratives often employ emotionally charged terms like “foreign occupiers,” “EU coup,” or “lawfare,” and depict Romanian institutions as proxies for Brussels or Washington. Platforms such as X have been instrumental in echoing these framings, with profiles like *@MarioNawfal* and *@MikeBenzCyber* among the most prolific amplifiers.

Geopolitical Implications

By portraying Romania as a victim of EU-orchestrated authoritarianism, these narratives undermine not only electoral trust but the very idea of European solidarity. The false dichotomy they construct between a sovereign Romania and a tyrannical supranational order has been instrumental in shaping the electoral discourse. If successful, this line of attack could contribute to a significant policy realignment, weakening Romania’s commitment to EU democratic standards, hindering NATO cooperation, and emboldening anti-EU movements across Central and Eastern Europe. This directly aligns with the foreign policy goals of both Russia and elements within the U.S. alt-right ecosystem, which seek to fracture EU unity and diminish the bloc’s geopolitical influence.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

The “International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control” cluster presumably aims to target voters disillusioned with Romania’s political trajectory, particularly younger demographics and rural communities that are active on Telegram and receptive to anti-establishment messaging. These narratives equate EU oversight and judicial intervention with coercion, elite overreach, and foreign domination, using emblematic cases like Călin Georgescu’s disqualification to validate claims of systemic injustice. The strategic effect is twofold: first, to erode confidence in pro-European candidates and institutions among undecided or moderate voters; and second, to channel discontent into support for nationalist, sovereigntist figures like George Simion. In doing so, the narratives exploit and amplify existing divides, threatening to depress turnout among pro-democracy constituencies while consolidating a reactive, anti-EU voting bloc.

Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat

Objective and Strategic Goals

Disinformation narratives within this cluster are crafted to situate the Romanian electoral process within a broader, orchestrated global conflict allegedly waged by shadowy transnational elites. These actors, variously labelled as “globalists,” “deep state,” or “hidden

cabals”, are portrayed as systematically undermining national sovereignty, manipulating democratic institutions, and imposing authoritarian control through covert means. The core strategic objective is to erode public trust not only in Romania’s domestic institutions but also in the legitimacy of the international order, including the European Union, NATO, and Western liberal democracies. By repeatedly casting Romania as a frontline victim in a global struggle against subjugation, these narratives seek to delegitimise the electoral process and discredit any candidate, party, or institution perceived as aligned with Western or “globalist” interests.

This narrative cluster frequently invokes apocalyptic or existential language, warning of imminent societal collapse, orchestrated pandemics, or engineered economic crises as tools wielded by these elites to maintain control. The messaging is deliberately designed to radicalise segments of the electorate, foster a sense of siege mentality, and deepen political polarisation. Ultimately, the goal is to shift public support toward anti-system, nationalist candidates who present themselves as defenders of national sovereignty and bulwarks against foreign domination, thereby undermining democratic norms and facilitating the rise of illiberal political forces.

Narrative Scope and Engagement

This cluster accounted for 146 distinct posts across X and Telegram, representing approximately 19.8% of all posts on X and 31.3% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated over 89.5 million views, 402.900 likes, and 134.000 retweets on X, while related messages on Telegram accumulated more than 941.200 views and 10.700 forwards. The narratives consistently employ sensationalist and conspiratorial language, including terms such as “globalist coup,” “new world order,” and “existential threat,” and frequently invoke QAnon tropes, the “Great Reset,” and references to orchestrated pandemics or economic crises. Posts often link Romanian electoral developments to alleged global plots involving high-profile figures like Donald Trump and Viktor Orbán, framing national events as components of a broader transnational conspiracy. These platforms have played a central role in both originating and recycling core conspiratorial themes, ensuring that the narrative of existential threat remains highly visible and persistent across both mainstream and alternative information environments.

Geopolitical Implications

The globalist conspiracy cluster serves to embed Romanian political developments within a transnational narrative of resistance against Western liberalism and multilateral governance. By aligning local grievances with broader anti-globalist themes, these narratives facilitate cross-border solidarity among populist and nationalist movements while undermining trust in both domestic and international institutions. Critically, the framing of Romania as a target of

global subversion resonates with audiences beyond its borders, potentially reinforcing Eurosceptic, anti-NATO, and anti-U.S. sentiments across Central and Eastern Europe. This dynamic aligns with the strategic interests of Russia and segments of the U.S. alt-right who seek to destabilise Western alliances and weaken the normative influence of the EU and NATO.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

The impact of this narrative is amplified by its emotional resonance and adaptability. By weaving together disparate grievances, ranging from pandemic management to economic instability and judicial rulings, these narratives create a comprehensive worldview that appeals to individuals already predisposed to distrust authority. The cluster's prominence on Telegram, in particular, suggests that it effectively mobilises highly engaged online communities. While the conspiratorial nature of the content may limit its credibility among mainstream audiences, its sheer volume contributes significantly to the overall disinformation environment, increasing confusion, fostering cynicism, and undermining democratic resilience. Ultimately, the globalist conspiracy cluster risks normalising extremist rhetoric, marginalising pro-democratic voices, and distorting the electoral debate in ways that favour authoritarian, anti-system actors.

QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal

Objective and Strategic Goals

The QAnon cluster serves a dual strategic function within the Romanian disinformation landscape. First, it aims to radicalise segments of the electorate by reframing political developments as manifestations of a broader spiritual and moral crisis. Second, it seeks to delegitimise all institutional authority: governments, courts, media, and civil society, by portraying them as infiltrated by a hidden elite cabal. The central narrative that nationalist figures like Călin Georgescu are silenced to conceal global crimes elevates the stakes of the election, transforming it from a democratic choice into a battle between good and evil. This positioning resonates with fringe audiences and conspiratorial communities while also bleeding into more mainstream nationalist discourse.

Narrative Scope and Engagement

Despite its relatively small volume of 43 posts, this cluster achieved over 1.2 million views on X and 328.600 views on Telegram, with high engagement on key alt-right and conspiracy-linked Telegram channels, representing approximately 7.2% of all posts on X and 4.7% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated over 27.000 likes and 13.000 retweets, indicating a highly

mobilised audience willing to amplify this content. Prominent accounts like *RealAlexJones* and *Iosefina Pascal* have acted as key vectors of dissemination, blending QAnon themes with Romanian electoral grievances. While numerically modest, the intensity of engagement signals a high risk for offline spillover, particularly through the framing of civil servants, journalists, or pro-democracy candidates as complicit in elite criminal conspiracies.

Geopolitical Implications

This cluster contributes to a broader erosion of democratic norms by encouraging epistemic collapse, the rejection of shared facts in favour of conspiratorial worldviews. In doing so, it directly undermines Romania's democratic institutions and positions the country as a key node in a transnational struggle against "globalist tyranny." These narratives are strategically aligned with U.S. alt-right actors who aim to internationalise the QAnon belief system, linking Trump's political mythology to European contexts. In Romania, this risks embedding far-right extremism into mainstream electoral narratives while simultaneously desensitising audiences to political violence, censorship fantasies, and authoritarian solutions.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

It is stated with a high degree of confidence that the QAnon clusters primarily target highly online, anti-system constituencies, often young men, nationalist voters, and fringe Telegram communities. Its emotionally charged and absolutist framing may have limited mass appeal, but it significantly distorts the information environment by flooding it with unverifiable, sensational claims. These narratives deepen distrust in electoral outcomes, discourage institutional engagement, and reinforce a populist imaginary in which violence, secrecy, and spiritual warfare are normalised. While unlikely to shift the broader electorate, the QAnon cluster plays a catalytic role, intensifying polarisation and serving as an ideological accelerant for more mainstream disinformation clusters.

Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence

Objective and Strategic Goals

This narrative cluster seeks to dismantle public trust in Romania's civil society by portraying NGOs and civic institutions as extensions of foreign interference, particularly from Western liberal elites, U.S. government-backed actors (such as USAID), and most prominently, George Soros. The strategic goal is to undermine the institutions that serve as bulwarks against disinformation and authoritarian drift and to delegitimise the liberal, progressive, and pro-European discourse these organisations are often associated with.

Central to this strategy is the symbolic use of George Soros as an analogy for corruption, manipulation, and elite dominance. In the Romanian political imagination, Soros has been systematically cast as the architect of a shadow regime, one that uses his network of NGOs to orchestrate judicial rulings, influence media narrative, and even steer electoral outcomes. By invoking Soros, disinformation agents are not merely targeting a financier; they are weaponising a deeply entrenched perception that equates progressive activism with foreign subjugation and institutional decay.

This symbolic framing is highly effective in the Romanian context, where corruption has long been a dominant theme in electoral discourse²². Since the country's post-communist transition, public frustration with clientelism, judicial manipulation, and political impunity has remained a potent political issue²³. By tying Soros-linked NGOs to electoral interference, such as the banning of Călin Georgescu or protests organised to pressure courts, these narratives reanimate Romania's corruption anxieties and reframe civil society as part of a broader, coordinated scheme to deny the "will of the people."

In this context, the resurgence of Soros in alt-right narratives is more than symbolic; it is a calculated appeal to Romania's political subconscious, where the battle against corruption is both deeply personal and evokes political mobilisation. These disinformation narratives do not just question the legitimacy of NGOs but portray them as proof that corruption in Romania is no longer internal but externally orchestrated, thus shifting the blame from domestic political elites to a transnational liberal elite working through "puppet institutions."

Narrative Scope and Engagement

Though smaller in volume, this cluster accounted for 58 distinct posts across X and Telegram, representing approximately 10.7% of all posts on X and 4.7% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated over 105.9 million views, 175.900 likes, and 59.300 retweets on X, while related messages on Telegram accumulated more than 196.000 views and 5.400 forwards. Content frequently emphasises alleged NGO led judicial meddling, "digital censorship" networks targeting conservative speech, and claims that Soros-backed entities are influencing constitutional judges and owning major media outlets like Newsweek Romania.

Narratives that target civil society actors are often interwoven with anti-EU and anti-NATO themes, presenting a composite worldview where the Romanian state, NGOs, and

²² Kiss, Tamás, and István Gergő Székely. "Populism on the Semi-Periphery: Some Considerations for Understanding the Anti-Corruption Discourse in Romania." *Problems of Post-Communism* 69, no. 6 (February 19, 2021): 514–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1869907>.

²³ Meqdadi, Leen. "The Fight Against Corruption in Romania: Struggles to Adhere to the Rule of Law and the (De) Legitimization of the ACA." *MacEwan University Student eJournal* 7, no. 1 (December 21, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.31542/g1x04b64>.

international institutions are all infiltrated by a corrupt liberal elite. The influence of these narratives is magnified by high-visibility Telegram accounts and alt-right influencers like *Iosefina Pascal* and *gatewaypunditofficial*, who repeatedly accuse civil society of operating as a “parallel state.”

Geopolitical Implications

Strategically, this cluster plays directly into the geopolitical interests of Russia and U.S. alt-right networks by weakening democratic oversight, discrediting transparency advocates, and reducing domestic appetite for Western-aligned reform. If civil society is viewed as corrupt or foreign-controlled, then its capacity to counter disinformation, monitor elections, or advocate for the rule of law becomes politically toxic. This creates space for illiberal consolidation and authoritarian tolerance, particularly among nationalist parties that seek to dismantle the checks and balances of liberal democracy.

Moreover, these narratives resonate beyond Romania. They echo broader alt-right conspiracies about the so-called “Soros network” operating across Eastern Europe, thus embedding Romanian events into a transnational disinformation strategy aimed at delegitimising democratic civil society infrastructure throughout the region.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

This cluster of narratives would most likely find the strongest resonance among nationalist, populist, and anti-globalist constituencies, particularly rural populations, younger men, and segments of the diaspora with limited engagement with mainstream Romanian institutions. Their growing distrust in civil society is not merely rhetorical; it affects real-world dynamics. Fact-checking efforts are dismissed as partisan. NGO-led civic education campaigns are boycotted, and judicial decisions aligned with the rule of law principles are reinterpreted as elite interventions.

In electoral terms, this undermines liberal candidates aligned with transparency, anti-corruption, and EU governance platforms, while strengthening figures like George Simion and Victor Ponta, who publicly advocate for banning Soros-linked NGOs and frequently refer to civil society actors as “domestic traitors.” The weaponisation of corruption as a foreign phenomenon disguised in domestic clothes thus becomes a powerful electoral tool, cloaking populist authoritarianism in the language of national renewal.

World War III Agenda

Objective and Strategic Goals

Disinformation narratives within this cluster are engineered to recast Romania's geopolitical position as perilously subordinate to Western interests, particularly NATO and the EU. The strategic objective is twofold: first, to erode public trust in Western institutions by portraying them not as guarantors of security, but as aggressors orchestrating an imminent military conflict with Russia; and second, to galvanise electoral support for anti-EU and anti-NATO candidates such as George Simion and Victor Ponta. These narratives frame the 2025 Romanian presidential elections as a pivotal moment in a global conspiracy, with nationalist candidates depicted as the last line of defence against foreign manipulation and war. The messaging alleges that NATO intends to use Romania as a trigger point for World War III, with figures like Călin Georgescu positioned as whistleblowers exposing Western plans for escalation. The EU Commission is simultaneously portrayed as complicit in undermining both Romanian and German sovereignty, further delegitimising the electoral process and state institutions.

Narrative Scope and Engagement

The WWIII cluster is notably less pervasive than others, accounting for 51 distinct posts across X and Telegram, representing approximately 9.2% of all posts on X and 4.3% on Telegram. Collectively, these posts generated approximately 11.5 million views, 138.700 likes, and 45.600 retweets on X, with Telegram posts reaching 25.100 views and 278 forwards. The narratives rely on highly conspiratorial and emotive language such as “globalist plots,” “NATO coup,” and “imminent war”, and frequently cite U.S. alt-right influencers, including Alex Jones, as authoritative sources. Despite the sensationalism, the reach and engagement of this cluster remain limited, confined mainly to fringe platforms and echo chambers with little evidence of significant mainstream penetration or viral amplification.

Geopolitical Implications

These narratives attempt to reframe Romania's Western alliances as existential threats, aligning with broader Russian and alt-right objectives to destabilise NATO's eastern flank and fracture European unity. By asserting that Romania is being manipulated into provoking Russia, these narratives seek to heighten public anxiety, fuel anti-Western sentiment, and legitimise calls for a foreign policy realignment toward isolationism or neutrality. However, the limited engagement data suggest that these messages are not broadly persuasive and primarily reinforce existing biases within a narrow segment of the electorate.

Vulnerability and Impact on the Election

The impact of this cluster is constrained by its relatively modest reach and resonance. Its primary audience consists of individuals already distrustful of Western institutions or receptive to anti-globalist rhetoric. While the narratives may intensify polarisation among fringe voters and embolden the messaging of nationalist candidates, there is little evidence to suggest a significant effect on mainstream electoral behaviour or public opinion. Critically, the narrative's reliance on hyperbolic and conspiratorial claims appears to limit its broader credibility, reducing its potential to meaningfully disrupt Romania's democratic process or regional stability. However, these narratives nonetheless contribute to the overall volume of disinformation surrounding the elections, thereby increasing the confusion of an electorate already inundated with misleading and manipulative content.

Recommendations: Strengthening Democratic Resilience

Youth, Peace, and Security

Disinformation poses an under-addressed threat to youth in Romania, particularly during critical democratic processes such as elections. Young Romanians are active users of digital platforms²⁴, yet they often lack the tools to engage with the content they encounter critically. In fact, they are increasingly aware of the dangers posed by fake news and algorithm-driven content manipulation; however, they report a lack of confidence in their ability to critically assess information or engage with it in a responsible and informed way²⁵. This vulnerability is compounded by a tendency to overestimate their capacity to detect falsehoods, exhibiting a “third-person effect,” where they believe others are more susceptible to disinformation than themselves. Such cognitive biases can contribute to the amplification of misleading narratives, reduce trust in democratic institutions, and skew political participation²⁶.

This risk is directly linked to the objectives of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, particularly in its emphasis on youth agency, participation, and protection. When exposed to hostile information environments without adequate media literacy, young people’s civic engagement is undermined, their political choices manipulated, and their role as informed actors in peacebuilding and democratic processes diminished²⁷. The intersection of digital vulnerability and political mobilisation is especially salient given that Romanian youth are also heavily involved in informal civic activities online, such as engaging with political content on TikTok and Instagram. Without strategic interventions, youth may be mobilised not toward constructive democratic participation but into radicalised echo chambers or politically motivated disinformation campaigns.

To counter this, policy responses must go beyond reactive fact-checking. As the literature emphasises, sustained and institutionalised media literacy education is required across

²⁴ Kemp, Simon. “Digital 2025: Romania — DataReportal — Global Digital Insights.” DataReportal — Global Digital Insights, March 3, 2025. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-romania>.

²⁵ Laine, Sharon. *Young People’s Civic Engagement through Digital Media: Examples from Finland, Norway and Romania*. Master’s thesis, University of Helsinki, 2023. <https://helda.helsinki.fi/server/api/core/bitstreams/d54a52d5-348e-4296-86b0-8abed2be5f2b/content>

²⁶ Crucian, Nicoleta. “The Fake News Phenomenon in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Perception of Romanian Students.” *Journal of Media Research* 16, no. 46 (2023): 28–45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24193/jmr.46.2>

²⁷ Corbu, Nicoleta, Denisa-Adriana Oprea, and Valeriu Frunzaru. “Romanian Adolescents, Fake News, and the Third-Person Effect: A Cross-Sectional Study.” *Journal of Children and Media* 16, no. 3 (2022): 387–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2021.1992460>.

Romania's high school and university systems²⁸. Media curricula should prioritise media literacy strategies, source verification, and an understanding of how digital platforms algorithmically prioritise content. Importantly, such programs should be designed not only to foster critical analysis but also to empower youth to be active participants in democratic life, which is in line with YPS principles. By integrating civic education with media literacy and tailoring interventions to Romania's digital landscape, youth can be equipped not only to resist manipulation but to contribute meaningfully to peace, accountability, and resilience in democratic processes.

Civil Society

Romanian civil society faces a growing legitimacy crisis due to targeted disinformation campaigns that depict NGOs as corrupt agents of foreign influence, particularly linked to figures like George Soros and Western liberal institutions. These narratives, widely disseminated across platforms like Telegram and X, frame civil society as part of a coordinated effort to undermine national sovereignty and manipulate the democratic process. As a result, watchdogs, transparency advocates, and electoral monitors are increasingly mistrusted by the public, particularly among rural and nationalist constituencies²⁹. This reputational damage severely undermines the effectiveness of NGOs in defending democracy, countering disinformation, and promoting civic engagement.

To counter this erosion of trust, Romanian NGOs must embrace radical transparency: clearly communicating funding, operations, and governance in accessible formats. They should localise outreach efforts, particularly in rural and digitally vulnerable communities, using trusted local messengers and regionally tailored narratives. Prebunking strategies that anticipate and proactively address common disinformation themes, such as NGO influence over courts or censorship efforts, are essential. Civil society must also form trust-based coalitions with independent media, academia, and community leaders to jointly defend democratic discourse and restore institutional credibility.

More broadly, civil society across Europe and internationally must institutionalise disinformation response mechanisms, including training, real-time monitoring, and strategic communications. Legal and digital resilience should be strengthened to guard against reputational attacks and online harassment. NGOs should also actively engage with

²⁸ Nygren, Thomas, Divina Frau-Meigs, Nicoleta Corbu, and Sonia Santoveña-Casal. "Teachers' Views on Disinformation and Media Literacy Supported by a Tool Designed for Professional Fact-Checkers: Perspectives from France, Romania, Spain and Sweden." *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 9, no. 1 (2022): Article 340. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-00340-9>.

²⁹ McNamara, K. R. (2025, May 8). *Fault lines in the East: Romania's political transformation and Europe's future*. Real Instituto Elcano.

regulatory frameworks like the Digital Services Act (DSA)³⁰ by contributing to platform accountability processes, reporting systemic disinformation, and leveraging transparency tools provided under the DSA. Defending civil society from disinformation is not only about protecting organisations, it is about preserving the democratic infrastructure that enables free, fair, and informed public participation.

International Organizations

International organisations, including the European Union, NATO, and affiliated institutions, have a critical role to play in countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) targeting Romania and its electoral processes. As revealed through this report's findings, disinformation campaigns linked to U.S. alt-right ecosystems, Russian interests, and transnational populist movements are not only challenging the integrity of the Romanian democratic process but are also actively seeking to undermine the normative legitimacy of international institutions themselves.

As our analysis shows, narrative clusters, such as those framing international institutions as occupiers or enforcers of “foreign lawfare,” have gained substantial traction across platforms like Telegram and X. These narratives aim to fracture trust in Euro-Atlantic institutions and shift electoral outcomes toward nationalist, anti-EU candidates. International organisations should therefore frame counter-disinformation efforts as part of a broader strategy for safeguarding democratic integrity, similar in urgency to hybrid threats like cyberwarfare and election interference.

To create a better understanding and enable the prevention of organised disinformation campaigns, investments in localised, real-time narrative monitoring and threat analysis capacities are necessary. International organisations should reinforce partnerships with civil society organisations, fact-checkers, and academic institutions to detect and understand context-specific narrative shifts. Strategic communications teams within international organisations should also adopt a proactive posture, issuing transparent, timely counter-narratives that clarify institutional roles and demystify false claims about international “control” or “coercion.”

Furthermore, the DSA offers a robust legal framework for addressing systemic disinformation, especially on Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) such as X, Telegram, and TikTok, all of which were central to disinformation dissemination during Romania's electoral campaigns and elections. The DSA mandates platforms to mitigate systemic risks to democratic processes

³⁰ “Regulation - 2022/2065 - EN - DSA - EUR-Lex,” n.d.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065>.

and civic discourse, including through transparency obligations, algorithmic accountability, and enforced content moderation policies³¹. Such measures should be hastily deployed to compel platforms to:

- Disclose how their algorithms amplify disinformation narratives
- Increase transparency around political advertising, especially foreign-funded content
- Cooperate with national electoral bodies and civil society for rapid response moderation

Moreover, International organisations should support the operationalisation of the DSA across member states by offering technical assistance, regulatory capacity-building, and cross-border enforcement coordination. The DSA can also serve as a model for other multilateral frameworks seeking to regulate platform-driven disinformation while preserving fundamental rights³².

As seen in the Romanian context, international institutions are not only targets of disinformation, but they themselves become the subject of narratives aiming to frame them as corrupt, colonial, untrustworthy, or authoritarian. Therefore, urgent measures should be taken to increase public transparency, community engagement, and data accessibility, such as:

- Offering open briefings on judicial or regulatory decisions affecting national elections;
- Investing in civic education initiatives that explain the roles of the EU, NATO and other International organisations in accessible terms
- Creating content that proactively refutes common myths (e.g., “the EU banned a Romanian candidate”) using verified, localised messaging.

Efforts must also extend beyond urban centres to rural and diasporic populations, which remain highly susceptible to transnational conspiracy narratives and often operate within alt-platform information ecosystems³³.

³¹ “Regulation - 2022/2065 - EN - DSA - EUR-Lex,” n.d.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065>.

³² “Regulation - 2022/2065 - EN - DSA - EUR-Lex,” n.d.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R2065>.

³³ Enders, A., Klostad, C., Diekmann, A. *et al.* The sociodemographic correlates of conspiracism. *Sci Rep* 14, 14184 (2024).

Conclusion: The American Alt-Right and Disinformation Ecosystem

This report has comprehensively mapped the strategic disinformation landscape surrounding Romania's 2025 presidential elections, revealing a multi-layered system of narrative warfare. The analysis identified six dominant narrative clusters, namely **Suppression of Democracy in Romania**, **International Institutions Framed as Mechanisms of Control**, **Globalist Conspiracy and the Narrative of Existential Threat**, **QAnon and the Fight Against the Secret Cabal**, **Civil Society Framed as Mechanisms of Influence**, and **World War III Agenda**, that function as interconnected storylines converging into a broader metanarrative. This metanarrative depicts Romania as a nation under siege from foreign elites, supranational institutions, and complicit domestic actors. Following the annulment of the 2024 election and the banning of Călin Georgescu, disinformation campaigns effectively leveraged algorithmic content delivery to exploit political uncertainty and deepen public disillusionment. Their aim is to erode trust in electoral institutions, discredit civil society, fuel scepticism toward EU and NATO alignment, and galvanise support for nationalist, anti-establishment candidates.

The impact assessment underscores the disinformation system's ability to reshape political participation and institutional trust. Clusters like *Suppression of Democracy* and *International Institutions as Mechanisms of Control* have succeeded in framing electoral and judicial decisions as foreign-imposed authoritarianism, profoundly influencing Romanian political discourse. Simultaneously, narratives targeting civil society and international institutions delegitimise core democratic safeguards, fostering suspicion, disengagement, and polarisation. These narratives not only reach large audiences but also emotionally resonate by embedding into Romania's historical grievances, economic anxieties, and cultural debates on sovereignty.

Furthermore, a notable dimension of the disinformation landscape is the convergence between Russian and U.S. alt-right narratives. While not directly coordinated, these ecosystems mutually amplify each other's content, blending anti-EU, anti-NATO, and anti-system messaging. Russian actors frequently cite U.S. influencers, while American networks recycle Kremlin-aligned themes to reinforce shared agendas. This informal synergy expands their reach, legitimises extremist discourse, and further destabilises democratic cohesion.

An important takeaway of this report is the susceptibility of Romanian youth to disinformation. While they are highly active in online environments, many lack the critical

literacy skills needed to evaluate the reliability of the content they consume. Their self-assuredness in navigating digital spaces often conceals a deeper vulnerability to algorithmically amplified manipulation. This challenge undermines their capacity to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, which is an issue closely tied to the priorities of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda.

To mitigate these challenges, the report issues three sets of recommendations. First, institutionalise media literacy across educational systems, focusing on source verification and algorithmic awareness. Second, bolster civil society by investing in transparency, local outreach, and coalition-building to restore public trust. Third, leverage the Digital Services Act (DSA) to demand accountability from platforms like X, TikTok, and Telegram, requiring more transparency on political advertising, algorithmic amplification, and foreign content influence.

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