

# Mapping Hybrid Interference

Lessons from Moldova's 2025 Parliamentary Elections

DATA ANALYSIS REPORT

JULY 2026



## A Data Driven Analysis: The Online Ecosystem ahead of the 2025 Moldovan Parliamentary Elections

### Methodological Approach and Data Validation

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*Accompanying contextual analysis:* [Vote at the Fault Line of Europe: Learnings from Moldova's 2025 Parliamentary Elections.](#)

Data collection was conducted over a four-month period, from 1<sup>st</sup> June to 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025, capturing the digital information environment in the critical run-up to Moldova's parliamentary elections. Extraction and monitoring processes occurred at regular intervals across multiple online platforms, including Telegram, TikTok, X, Facebook, VKontakte, YouTube, and select web sources. The collection strategy combined targeted keyword tracking with platform-native search functionalities, enabling the systematic capture of content related to both structured influence operations and the broader political discourse (associated with electoral blocs/parties as well as leaders).

This study's methodological approach was selective rather than exhaustive, privileging strategic relevance over total volume saturation – consistent with hybrid threat analysis and cross-platform forensics. Particular attention was paid to content that exhibited signals of strategic coordination or repetition, foreign amplification or attribution to known influence networks, as well as the narrative engineering around divisive and security-sensitive themes. The keyword framework combined three sources:

- General thematic terms such as “Moldova”, “elections”, “vote”, and “parliament” to capture the mainstream discursive terrain.

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- Specific names and hashtags associated with candidates, parties and political coalitions – including those flagged in investigative journalism or civil society reporting.
- Inductively refined terms that emerged during preliminary rounds of data collection, allowing the search corpus to evolve in tandem with the information ecosystem itself.

The overarching aim was to capture not only the content of influence operations, but also their Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs) – **the behavioural layer**. Albeit not exhaustive, these include the use of coordinated cross-posting, platform-specific manipulation strategies, disguised amplification tactics, and camouflaged affiliations (i.e. pro-Russian actors posing as neutral, pro-European or *sovereignist* entities). The merged dataset was therefore curated to enable forensic inquiry into:

- The provenance and dissemination chains of strategic messaging.
- The temporal evolution of narrative clusters (i.e. anti-EU, neutralist, irredentist, anti-establishment).
- The cross-platform architecture of influence operations and coordinated disinformation campaigns.
- The deployment of known or novel TTPs in digital manipulation, including misattribution, recycled narratives, and proxy amplification.

With 5,200 entries, the cross-platform dataset integrates content metadata (timestamps, platforms, engagement metrics), actor attribution (including compromised or disinformation-linked entities), and origin tracing (where identifiable), enabling both granular and structural mapping of Moldova’s pre-electoral information space. A separate TikTok dataset was parsed for analysis, in partnership with investigative journalists from the FACT EU Hub, and extracted using FactorY, an in-house AI-based software. The narratives were then processed in the PROMPT Corpus Analyser to identify rhetorical devices associated with political discourse and patterns of memetic amplification. The insights drawn from just over 2,100 TikTok posts revealed the mechanisms behind the populist party’s (PPDA’s) ascendance.

Another separate dataset focused on the Wikipedia corpus of Moldovan-related content prior to the elections. Using statistical analysis across 25 variables, this study probed the extent to which Wikipedia’s public knowledge ecosystem is exposed to manipulation and how. This pioneering approach advances **electoral integrity research into the epistemic domain**, where information credibility is latently shaped long before it reaches social platforms. By quantifying composite metrics such as manipulation and sourcing risks, as well as behavioural volatility, the analysis reveals **how coordinated editing can subtly recalibrate what counts as factual consensus within the digital public record**.

Furthermore, **to reinforce analytical reliability in detecting coordination patterns**, the datasets underwent cross-validation **using the Qriton Data Pipeline**, a purpose-built analytical environment designed to process large-scale, time-sensitive data streams.<sup>3</sup> Notably, for anomaly detection, **Hopfield networks** were deployed, a form of evolved neural network optimised for pattern recognition in time-evolving graphs, particularly subtle forms of coordination or repetition across fragmented digital spaces (i.e. clustered posting behaviour, account synchronisation, and temporal

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<sup>3</sup> Qriton’s (qriton.com) infrastructure supported multiple forensic functionalities in the detection of coordinated behaviour. The Annex section includes validation statements from the cross-platforms datasets. Through the Smart Prompt Builder (an AI-driven agent workflow generator), the study successfully selected data sources and automated aspects of exploratory data analysis, ensuring consistency and replicability.

validation).<sup>4</sup> In practical terms, the pipeline validated the results of earlier analytical layers, including semantic clustering (0.75 similarity threshold) and actor attribution, confirming coherence within the broader temporal structure of the dataset. In an initial iteration, Hopfield-based detection flagged approximately **35 coordinated campaigns** from the cross-platform dataset, indicative of narrative recycling, templated amplification and message discipline among known and proxy accounts. The **confidence threshold of 60% or higher** was considered **strategically significant** and cross-referenced with known threat actor profiles.

In a nutshell, the validation process involved:

- **Anomaly detection via Hopfield networks**, capable of storing and retrieving associative patterns. The model could detect subtle temporal repetitions and latent associative memory structures within disinformation and information manipulation campaigns. This approach was particularly well-suited to datasets where coordination is obscured by decentralised or proxy entities obscure coordination.
- **Semantic clustering**: posts and messages were grouped using semantic similarity at a 0.75 cosine threshold, flagging clusters of near-identical phrasing and structure, indicative of templated or recycled scripts.
- **Temporal actor validation**: actor-content-time relationships were mapped across platforms to flag accounts exhibiting abnormal behaviour patterns, such as coordinated bursts of messaging, mirroring of external sources or behavioural anomalies across multiple identities.
- **Confidence scoring**: a coordination confidence level above 60% was deemed strategically relevant and used to filter high-risk content for deeper inspection. Each flagged cluster was cross-referenced with known disinformation proxies or previously identified influence operators.

By combining cross-platform extraction, rhetorical analysis, machine learning clustering, and neural symbolic-based validation, this methodology reflects a comprehensive forensic approach to information threat detection. The proposed framework bridges the gap between traditional content analysis and AI-powered forensics, mediating a granular understanding of how electoral manipulation is architected, amplified, and legitimised across online platforms and the web. Moreover, the inclusion of epistemic infrastructure (via Wikipedia analysis) sets an innovative precedent in electoral threat modelling and offers scalable tools for future assessments.

## Situating Digital Consumption

The population of Moldova is roughly 3 million, with another million understood to make up the Moldovan diaspora. A 2025 diagnostic indicates that mobile connections in Moldova exceeded 3.86 million (approximately 128% of the population), and around 2.42 million internet users, meaning roughly four-in-five Moldovans were online.<sup>5</sup> Median download speeds continued to climb, showing year-on-year gains of 63.6% for mobile connections and 26.4% for fixed lines, respectively. This improved infrastructure has translated into broad digital engagement, with 1.4 million social media user identities as of January 2025 (around 46% of Moldova's total population).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ramsauer, H., Schafli, B., Lehner, J., Seidl, P., Widrich, M., Gruber, L., Holzleitner, M., Pavlović, M., Sandve, G.K., Greiff, V., Kreil, D.P., Kopp, M., Klambauer, G., Brandstetter, J., & Hochreiter, S., Hopfield Networks is All You Need, July 2020, ArXiv, <https://arxiv.org/abs/2008.02217>

<sup>5</sup> Simon Kemp, Digital 2025 Moldova, DataReportal Report, March 2025, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-moldova?rq=Moldova>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* As for the data reported, the methodology aimed to de-de-duplicate social media users across different social platforms, however, the authors note may not represent unique individuals.

A survey conducted in May-June 2025 found that **nearly half of respondents relied on social networks as their primary or secondary sources for political information.**<sup>7</sup> Although there are some variations across reporting sources, platform-level figures show that Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok remained the dominant networks at the start of 2025. However, these statistics do not include messaging apps such as Telegram, WhatsApp, Viber or Signal. A study from 2020-2021 indicates that more than a quarter of internet users (approximately 28%, based on survey data) access Telegram daily, the **under-25 demographic** being the most active user bases.<sup>8</sup>

While these figures offer a useful diagnostic of Moldova's digital ecosystem, they do not accurately reflect actual engagement or exposure dynamics. Most studies capture self-reported or platform-advertising data within Moldova's borders, excluding the sizeable diaspora, whose digital behaviour and political mobilisation patterns remain consequential. Moreover, indicators of reach conflate technical access with attention spans and trust, offering at best a surface map of fragmented preferences. Survey data, though valuable in tracing attitudinal shifts, rely on declared habits rather than granular behavioural analytics, leaving opaque how individuals navigate algorithmically curated or cross-platform spaces. Such limitations suggest that digital consumption indicators should be read as proxies rather than definitive measures, particularly in a context where multi-platform exposure, coordinated amplification and transnational information flows blur the boundaries of national online publics.

Furthermore, **digital metrics themselves have become increasingly unreliable.** Platform metrics are now shaped by non-transparent AI-driven algorithms, rendering cross-platform comparisons and external verification extremely difficult. The inflation of views and impressions through bots, paid boosts, or AI-generated content further distorts authenticity and sentiment analyses. Compounded by tightened data access regimes, these conditions have generated fragmented data silos, where metrics cannot be meaningfully reconciled across platforms or time.<sup>9</sup> In the analysis, engagement metrics are deployed not as absolute indicators of audience behaviour, but as heuristic devices to reveal how each platform's infrastructure affords visibility, and how native algorithms can be strategically gamed to amplify certain narratives and actors.

## The Scale and Centre of Gravity (Cross-platform)

The monitored online ecosystem spans just over 5,220 entries collected between June and September 2025 across seven major platforms: Telegram, TikTok, Facebook, X, VK, YouTube, and select web domains. While comprehensive in design, the dataset is not exhaustive. It captures a strategically curated slice of the broader information environment, focused on relevance, engagement and disinformation-linked activity, and is therefore best read as indicative rather than fully representative.

Within this scope, approximately 3,600 posts were tagged as disinformation or coordinated influence operations, based on a range of indicators, including state-affiliation (i.e. government-controlled or sponsored media outlets), recycled narratives, origin tracing, and previously documented networks of malign actors. Telegram emerged as the central operational layer, with over 3,000 posts, more than 77% of which are attributed to disinformation-linked actors or compromised accounts. It serves as both a primary channel for initial dissemination and a redistribution vector across other platforms.

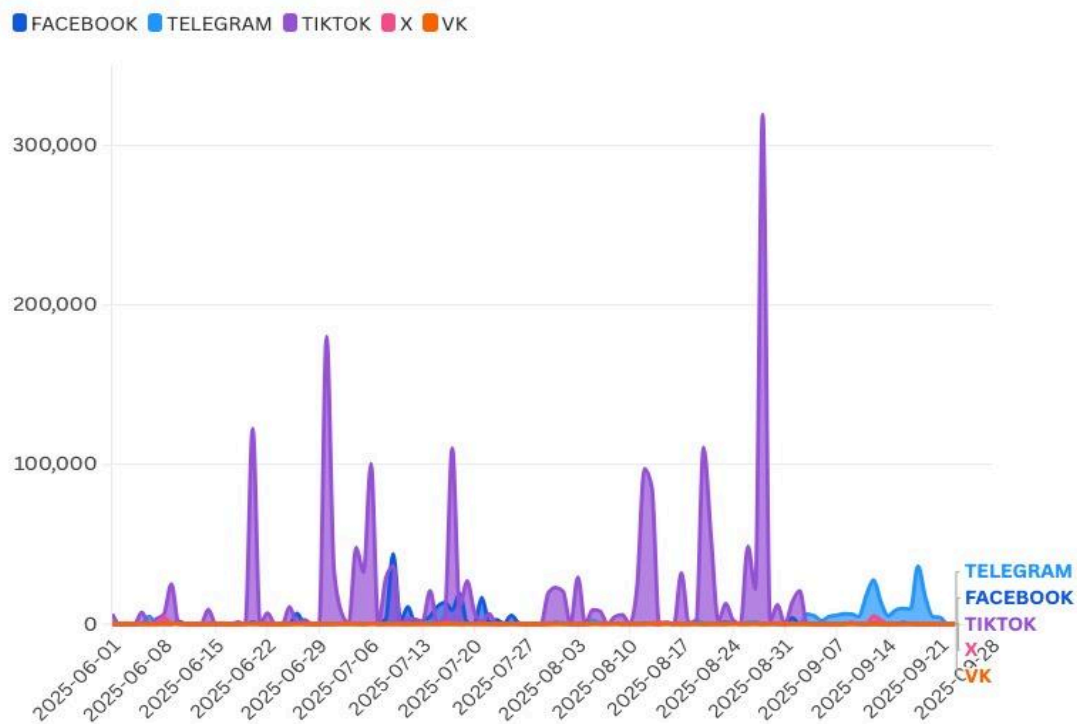
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<sup>7</sup> International Republican Institute, National Survey of Moldova, June 2025, <https://www.iri.org/resources/national-survey-of-moldova-may-2025/>

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Reuters Foundation & BBC Media Action, Moldova: Media Consumption and Audience Perceptions Research (Report), <https://epim.trust.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Lynnette Hui Xian Ng and Kathleen M. Carley, A global comparison of social media bot and human characteristics', *Scientific Reports* 15, Article number: 10973, March 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-96372-1>. Also refer to: Jakob Ohme et al. 2024. Digital Trace Data Collection for Social Media Effects Research. *Communication Methods and Measures* 18, no. 2. pp. 124-41.

Figure 1. Engagement Trends Across Platforms (June–September 2025)<sup>10</sup>



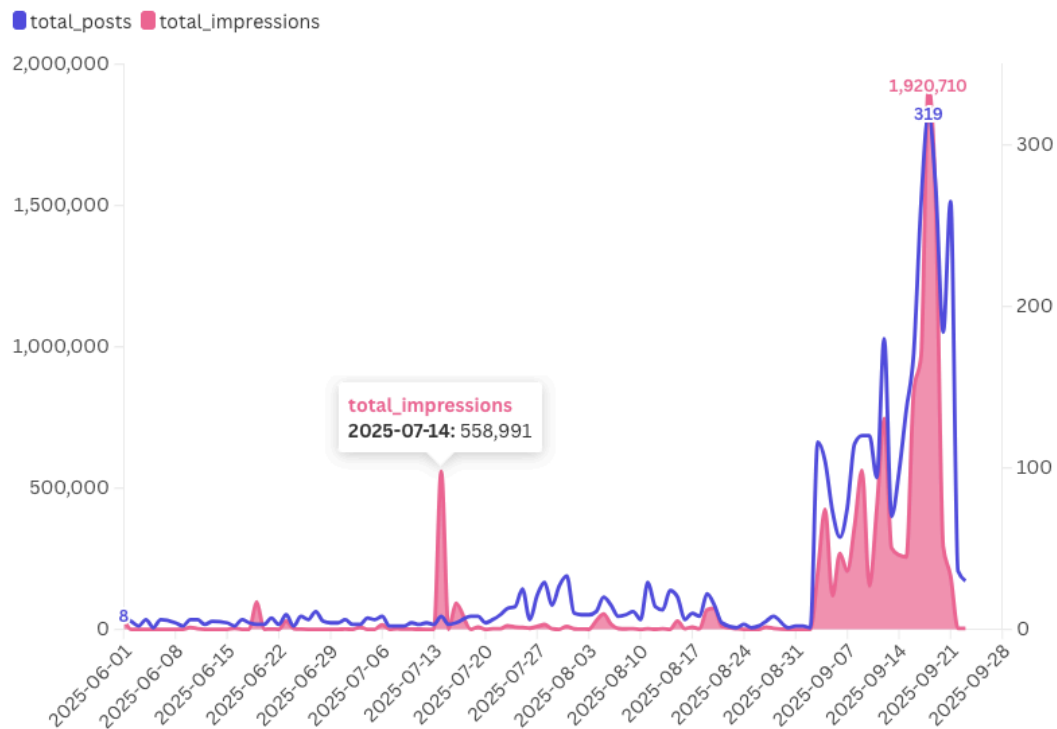
While the dataset captures only a partial facet of TikTok activity, preliminary figures indicate high engagement intensity, with over 17.8 million views and 1.85 million reactions from just 217 entries. These trends highlight TikTok's disproportionate visibility and capacity for mobilisation – its actual impact substantially greater than it may initially appear. Comparatively, Telegram content amassed 13.7 million views and 229,000 reactions, with narratives often originating from high-audience Russian or proxy channels.

In the lead-up to the vote, the online information environment exhibited heightened activity, with clear signals of increased platform engagement, narrative seeding, and audience (micro)targeting. While the dataset analysed here captures many of the core dynamics and amplification strategies observed during the pre-electoral period, it represents only a snapshot of the broader ecosystem. Additional data, particularly from intervals prior to the vote and diaspora-facing content streams, may have revealed further layers of cross-border amplification as the election date approached.

Cumulatively, the **disinformation segment of the ecosystem** exceeds 11 million measured impressions (views and reactions), with activity surges clustered around late July and mid-September, coinciding with offline mobilisation attempts, decisions from electoral authorities, and/or proxy campaign escalations (timeline graph below).

<sup>10</sup> Cross-platform engagement activity recorded across the monitored dataset between June and September 2025.

**Figure 2. Temporal Distribution of Disinformation Ecosystem Impressions, Showing Impression Spikes Around Key Electoral and Mobilisation Events (June–September 2025)**



## Beyond Hard Borders – Online Geographies & Diasporic Spaces

Where the country of origin for compromised actors could be traced, the cross-platform data sample revealed a concentration of activity in Moldova and Russia, with Moldovan accounts responsible for the highest volume of disinformation-tagged posts, while Russian-origin accounts generated disproportionately high engagement relative to their output. With the latter posting 559 times, but over 5,750,000 measured impressions (views and reactions combined). This trend suggests the use of amplification infrastructures or pre-established/captive audiences.

A smaller but non-negligible share of disinformation-linked content also originated from accounts geolocated across Europe, in Romania, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, as well as the United States, etc., likely tied to diaspora clusters, proxy amplification, or regionally coordinated influence assets. In a nutshell, the vast geographical footprint emphasises the transnational character of the ecosystem, which blends localised seeding with cross-border mobilisation tactics.

**A distinctive feature of Russian-affiliated activity was the production and dissemination of narratives in multiple languages through channel/account spin-offs, and often with near-identical semantic structures.** These spin-offs were tailored for consumption across Romanian, French, German and English-speaking audiences, to match local discursive frames. Other clusters were also identified in Japanese and Arabic for regionally targeted dissemination, emanating from Russian-origin channels.

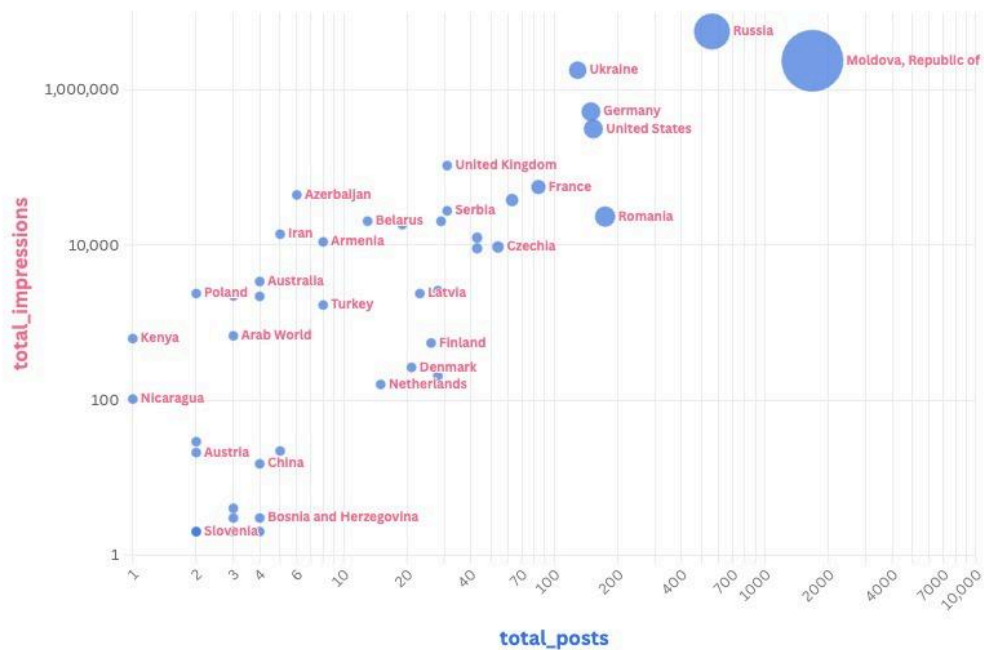
**However, online geographies are often strategically misleading, and intentionally so.** Attribution in digital environments is a notoriously cumbersome process, especially when disinformation/influence operations actors actively employ obfuscation tactics to mask provenance. Channels or accounts that appear to operate from the UK or Germany are likely controlled by actors/units elsewhere, using VPNs, spoofed metadata, or leased digital infrastructures to shield through plausible deniability.

Geographical ambiguity is common among state-aligned or proxy operations, to enable even broader narrative reach while concealing operational origins. In effect, the digital topology of influence operations is not fixed by borders but instead is defined by strategic dispersion and language-based targeting to appear culturally or politically native. The result is **a layered disinformation strategy that couples linguistic localisation with centralised message control**. This is precisely why, in order to surface operational linkages, the approach fused geolocation analysis with behavioural, semantic and temporal forensics.

**Map 1. Geographical Distribution of the Disinformation-Linked Ecosystem by Country of Origin, June-September 2025<sup>11</sup>**



**Figure 3. Geographic Distribution of Posts and Impressions Across the Monitored Information Ecosystem<sup>12</sup>**



<sup>11</sup> Geographic distribution of the disinformation-linked ecosystem, showing the country of origin where attribution was possible. Data are aggregated by country and represent the total number of posts published between June and September 2025.

<sup>12</sup> Bubble scatterplot illustrating the geographic distribution of posting activity and total impressions across the monitored information ecosystem between June and September 2025. Bubble size reflects relative amplification volume.

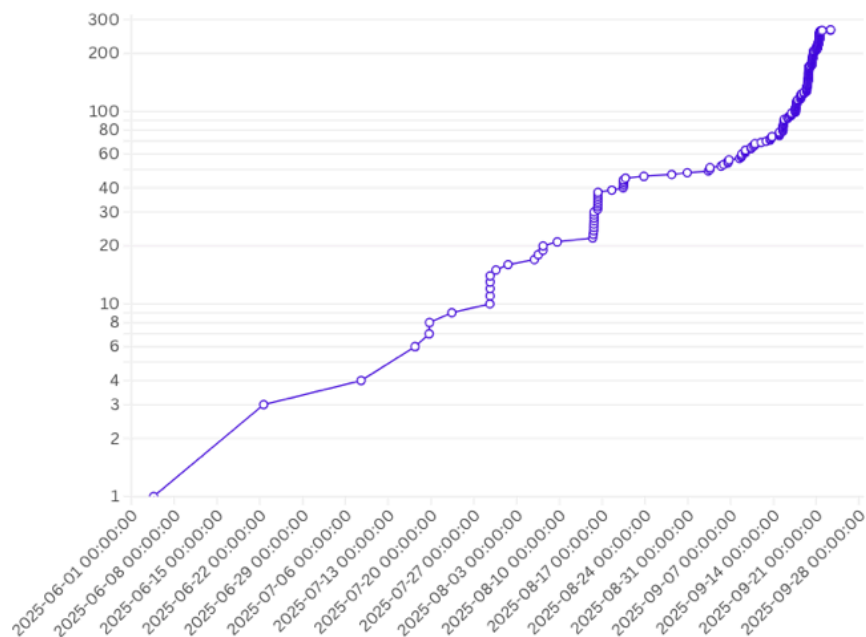
Crucially, the demographic presence of diaspora communities needs to be factored in when assessing the geographical origin and transnational propagation of manipulative content. Diaspora populations, particularly across Europe (in Romania, Italy, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and so forth), represent not only a consequential electoral bloc – eligible to participate via external voting mechanisms – but also a strategic vector for influence operations. These communities were frequently targeted through platform-specific content (disseminated in multiple languages) that was framed to undermine trust in democratic participation, question its legitimacy, or exploit perceived disconnections between diaspora preferences and domestic sentiment. On the voting day, offline destabilisation tactics, including bomb threats reported at polling stations abroad, were deployed to induce fear, suppress turnout, and provoke administrative disruption.

However, the targeting of diasporic constituencies forms only one axis of a broader operational strategy. **Influence campaigns concurrently seek to reshape perceptions within host European publics, subtly embedding narratives that portray Moldova’s democratic processes as unstable, externally manipulated or geopolitically compromised. This convergence of digital and physical pressure points reflects a hybridised tactic: seeding doubt and polarising the Moldovan polity, while simultaneously eroding international confidence in Moldova’s democratic resilience and progress towards integration.** Furthermore, offline events and/or procedural decisions from the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), such as the opening of polling stations abroad, including in separatist Transnistria and Russia (for those extraterritorial constituencies), were consistently instrumentalised to sow distrust in electoral/democratic processes and incite civil unrest prior to the vote.

### **Under the Microscope – The Transnistria Case**

Between 4<sup>th</sup> June and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025, approximately 263 posts referencing voting and separatist Transnistria were disseminated across five major platforms (*distribution graph below*), originating from 78 unique accounts – a disinformation campaign sustained over a four-month period. The narrative thread spanned Telegram, TikTok, X, and affiliated web domains. While 35 accounts lack identifiable geolocation metadata, the majority originated from Moldova (54), followed by the United States (37), Romania (34), Russia (27) and various European states, including Italy (25), the United Kingdom (21), and Spain (10). However, as indicated above, when it comes to online geographies and origin attribution, ‘nothing is what it seems’ either.

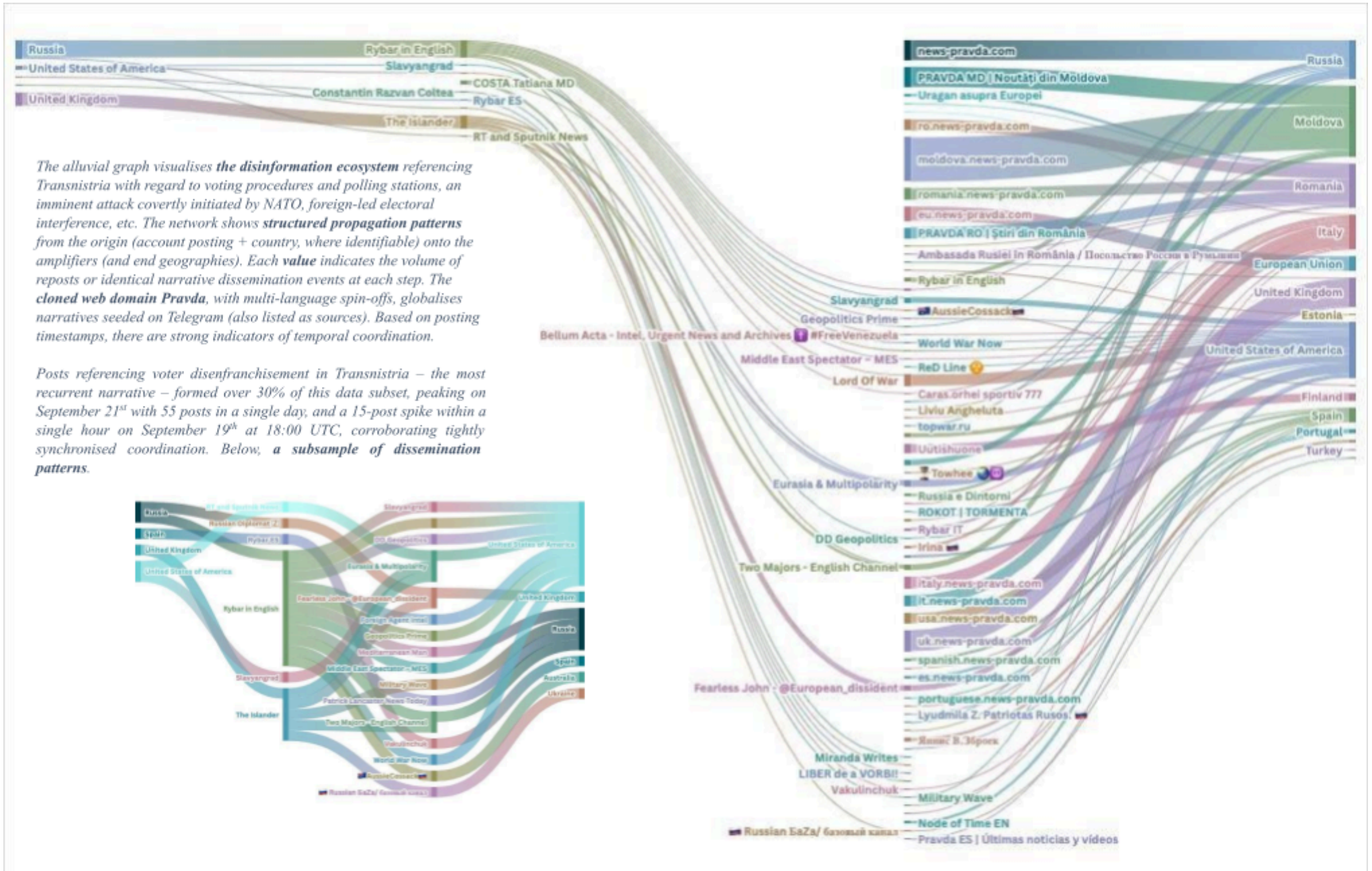
**Figure 4. Temporal Distribution of Election- and Transnistria-Related Disinformation Posts (June-September 2025)<sup>13</sup>**



The data reveals a deliberate pattern of propagation, with cross-platform, multi-language seeding designed to manufacture reach and legitimacy. A significant subset of posts were seeded and/or amplified by entities (accounts, channels, etc.) affiliated with Russian influence operations, such as *Rybar*, *Slavyangrad*, and *The Islander*, often through language-specific offshoots targeting Moldovan, Romanian, and even more prominently, global audiences. This is to say that even if an account appears to be based in Spain and consistently posts in Spanish, in fact, it acts as a localised spin-off of a much larger foreign influence network. The recurrent narrative template framed the reduction of polling stations in Transnistria as ethnic disenfranchisement, strategically contrasted with the expansion of diaspora voting across Western Europe. This was paired with allegations of Western, Romanian, and Ukrainian interference in Moldova’s electoral processes, as well as militaristic disinformation. For instance, claims of an impending aggression towards Transnistria and Moldova, orchestrated as a NATO proxy to the war in Ukraine. Activity peaked on 21<sup>st</sup> September, cumulating 55 posts in just one day, and an hourly burst of 15 posts on 19<sup>th</sup> September (at 18:00 UTC). During the week of 15<sup>th</sup> September, 138 posts were pushed in a concentrated burst. The use of identical messaging across accounts/channels, coupled with concentrated timing, supports a pattern of synchronised dissemination.

<sup>13</sup> The line graph visualises the temporal (sequential) distribution of disinformation posts related to elections and Transnistria across the monitored period (June-September). Each circle represents an individual post plotted by timestamp. The marked acceleration in posting frequency in early September - with clusters of near-simultaneous entries - is indicative of coordinated campaign behaviour, most likely tied to strategic narrative deployment ahead of the vote. The punctuated bursts and compressed timing suggest centralised scheduling or message discipline typical of influence operations.

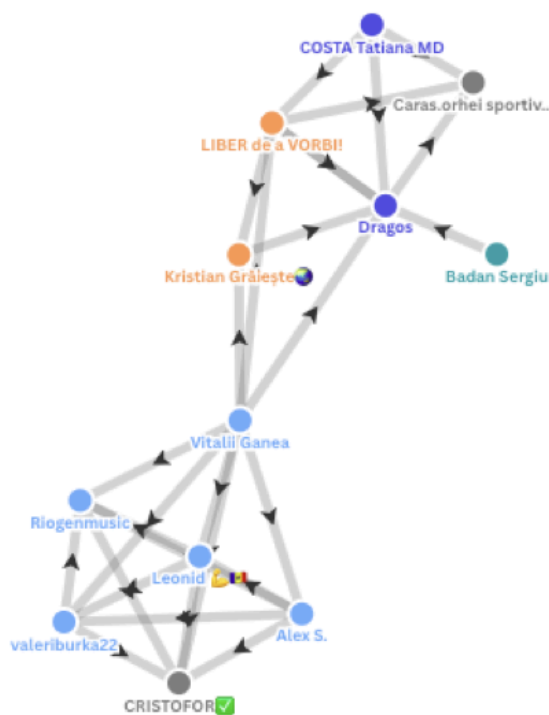
Figure 5. Cross-Platform Dissemination Pathways of Transnistria-Related Disinformation Narratives





across platforms, with targeted messaging in English. Mimicking spontaneous dissent, the same tactic of narrative laundering and scripted mobilisation extended to Moldova’s domestic information space via TikTok. Some of the most reactive content amplifying the voter suppression narrative emerged from a coordinated TikTok cluster of four accounts: *Dragos*, *Caras.orhei sportiv 7777*, *LIBER de a VORBI!!*, and *COSTA Tatiana MD*. Each circulated an identical video post, denouncing the reduction of polling stations in Transnistria, with the messaging linguistically tailored for a Moldovan audience.<sup>18</sup> The amplification pattern, marked by high semantic uniformity and tightly timed dissemination, suggests a deliberate attempt to manufacture virality while mimicking spontaneous, grassroots dissent. Together, the posts amassed 161,000 impressions, an unusually high volume for content that exhibited no narrative or visual variation. The accounts are linked to Tatiana Costachi, a Moldovan propagandist who reiterates distinctly pro-Russian narratives, often camouflaged in an ethno-nationalist, profoundly anti-Western, and anti-establishment veneer.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 7. Coordinated TikTok Interaction Network Within the Moldovan Information Ecosystem<sup>20</sup>**



Furthermore, two adjacent clusters were identified (see Figure 7) with similar architecture but distinct narrative frames: one centred on **anti-EU mobilisation**, and another on **diaspora scapegoating**. Both are linked to the amplification network associated with Costachi – notably, the accounts *Dragos*, *Caras.orhei sportiv 7777*, *LIBER de a VORBI!!*, and *COSTA Tatiana MD*.

The anti-EU cluster comprises 18 posts from 12 accounts, generating over 1.37 million impressions, while the diaspora scapegoating cluster includes 23 posts from 11 accounts, reaching approximately 1.88 million impressions. Despite their thematic divergence, both clusters replicate the dissemination pattern observed in earlier content: high semantic uniformity, identical/copy-pasted or minimally altered scripts, released in tight temporal windows (within 24-48 hours).

Messaging frames the EU as an exploitative colonial threat undermining Moldova’s economy and sovereignty, while simultaneously mobilising viewers to engage in economic nationalism (i.e. ‘Buy only local products to escape European colonists’). Meanwhile, the diaspora cluster redirects frustration inward, portraying Moldovans abroad as a parasitic force, responsible for inflating real estate prices, manipulating elections through absentee

<sup>18</sup> At the centre of amplification is this message: “Asociatia Juristilor din Republica Moldova si-au pronuntat ingrijorarea si condamna ferm decizia de a pune mai putine sectii de vot in regiunea transnistreana. (...) Este antidemocratic. Incalca drepturile omului. Guvernarea PaS, incompetenta, nu permite votul celor din Rusia si impune obstacole pentru diaspora din Europa. Prin observatorii controlati de ei, vor face ce vor cu voturile. Oare aceste alegeri vor fi corecte sau din nou fraudate? (...)”. Translation: The Association of Jurists of the Republic of Moldova has expressed concern and strongly condemns the decision to reduce the polling stations in Transnistria. (...) This is anti-democratic. It violates human rights. The current PaS government, incompetent, does not allow those in Russia to vote and imposes obstacles for the diaspora in Europe. Through their controlled observers, they will do what they want with the votes. Will these elections be fair, or once again fraudulent?

<sup>19</sup> Victoria Borodin, Propagandist profile // Tatiana Cosatchi (Costa Moldovanca), Stopfals, August 2024, <https://stopfals.md/ro/article/profil-de-propagandist-tatiana-costachi-costa-moldovanca-teze-sovietice-de-statalism-antiromanesc-falsuri-despre-nato-romanizarea-militarizarea-si-atragerea-r-moldova-in-razboi-181000>

<sup>20</sup> Network visualisation of a subset of TikTok accounts exhibiting recurrent interaction and amplification patterns within the monitored Moldovan information ecosystem. Nodes represent accounts, while directional edges indicate repeated interaction or dissemination relationships across the dataset.

ballots, or abandoning Moldova while abusing its services. **Such inflammatory rhetoric exploits economic anxiety, generational divides, and post-Soviet identity fractures to deepen resentment and sow division between citizens at home and abroad. Despite thematic variation, both clusters converge on a unifying logic of betrayal, reinforcing a wider disinformation ecosystem rooted in institutional distrust, anti-Western sentiment, and identity-driven polarisation.** Despite being operated by relatively low-follower, low-engagement accounts, the two clusters' coordinated structure enabled disproportionate visibility, pushing total reach above 3.2 million impressions. A similar tactic could be observed in a parallel TikTok subset associated with Vasile Costiuc, leader of the populist PPDA party, suggesting the strategic use of TikTok as an amplification engine for (emotionally triggered) mobilisation.

## **Under the Microscope – PPDA and Vasile Costiuc Case**

Vasile Costiuc, president of the *Democratia Acasa* (Democracy at Home) political platform (PPDA), boosted his profile visibility through a network of affiliated TikTok accounts, spreading manipulative content and outright disinformation. Here the narrative pathways are examined, rhetorical patterns and emotional appeals of his messaging. The TikTok dataset, consisting of 2,171 entries, was extracted and parsed through the AI-based Factory software deployed by the investigative outlet Context.ro (coordinator of the EU FACT Hub, part of the European Digital Media Observatory). The rhetorical analysis was derived using the PROMPT Corpus Analyser, developed in a European consortium.

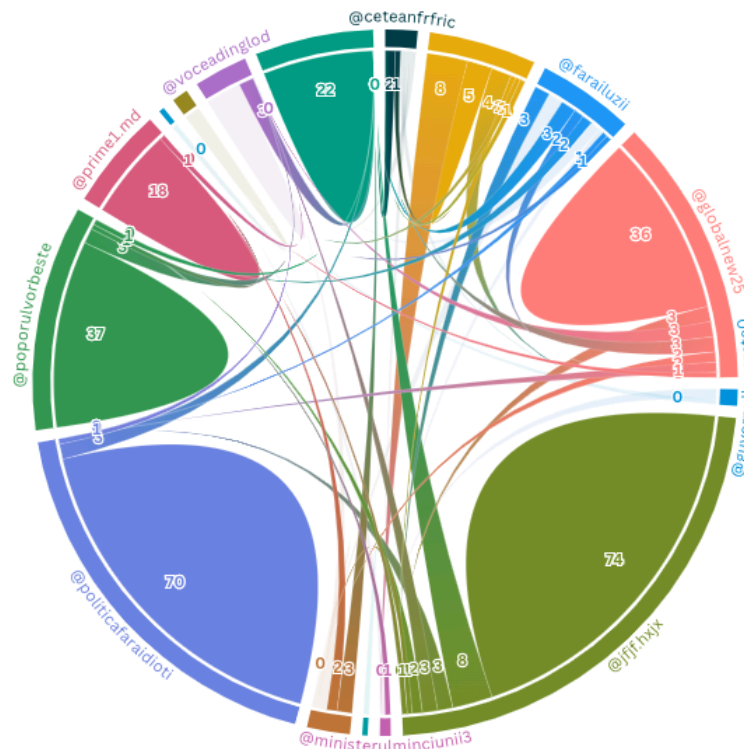
The following section provides an analysis of the integrated strategy that simultaneously targets Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine through vast, transnationally spanning disinformation networks, and coordinated influence operations. The cross-border spillovers were evident. George Simion, the far-right leader of AUR (a Romanian political party with spinoffs in Moldova), is a vocal supporter of Costiuc and his political platform. The rhetorical arsenal follows similar if not identical patterns across an identifiable repertoire of topics/themes: from the grievances of local farmers and producers, to asserting sovereignty and 'taking back control' of the government, economy, whilst dismantling the 'illegitimate, corrupt establishment'.

The targets of this messaging (emanating from Costiuc and affiliates) extend beyond the political sphere, into civil society, media, and other domains (prompting libels against his network from reputed civic activists, journalists, etc.). In fact, this is a crucial conceptual shift, as it demonstrates how propagandists (similar to Costiuc) are not merely competing in electoral politics but are actively working to reshape an entire ecosystem of public discourse – essentially redefining who is trustworthy, which narratives are legitimate, and which forms of civic participation are acceptable. The discourse, therefore, moves beyond winning the parliamentary elections, into a socio-political purge and change of paradigm.

### **o Coordination & Amplification Patterns**

There are approximately 337 duplicate entries or identical content repeats across multiple TikTok accounts (2,171 total entries in the dataset). Far from incidental, these indicate a systematic practice of cross-posting similar or identical scripts. In practice, the accounts may be either centrally managed or follow a coordinated distribution pipeline. At least 11 TikTok accounts recycled their own content heavily, with nearly 200 unique transcripts reposted, adding up to 274 redundant pushes. Even without cross-account coordination, single accounts try to game TikTok's algorithm by reposting the same script multiple times – a tactic of content flooding.

Figure 8. Recurrent Interaction and Amplification Patterns Within a TikTok Account Network<sup>21</sup>



Furthermore, some account pairs share dozens of transcripts, forming the ‘spine’ of the network, the hubs that recycle narratives most aggressively. In many cases, the same accounts reappear across multiple strong edges (connections), suggesting a core cluster of operators tied together by repeated scripts. Two distinct coordination patterns emerge:

- **Twin accounts:** pairs of accounts that consistently post almost identical content, suggesting they are controlled by the same operator or team. These accounts function as ‘mirrors’ of each other, used to multiply the visibility of identical messages.
- **Cluster accounts:** larger groups where each account is strongly linked to multiple others through shared scripts. This dynamic creates a dense web of cross posting that gives the impression of a grassroots swarm and organic support, while in reality, it is a tightly managed cluster.

Taken together, these dynamics reveal the network expands by replicating the same narratives across a web of interconnected accounts. The most influential ties reveal which accounts are moving in unison, demonstrating that what appears to be a chorus of voices is, in reality, a centrally controlled echo-chamber. Intriguingly, the narratives and rhetorical devices mirror deep emotional appeals: the struggles of local farmers and producers, localised economic grievances, victimhood and persecution, and so forth. Many of the repetitive scripts also centre on personal tragedies – a husband who lost his toes and survives on a modest disability pension, parents unable to afford surgeries, a family evicted from their home – aiming to attract a vast (outraged) audience and trigger emotional

<sup>21</sup> Network diagram of TikTok account interactions in repetitive content amplification. The chord diagram visualises the content-sharing and mutual amplification patterns among monitored TikTok accounts during the pre-election period. Each arc represents a distinct account, with connecting ribbons denoting shared/repetitive or re-amplified content across profiles. Importantly, the diagram reveals both tightly bound sub-networks and bridging accounts that facilitate dissemination. Such patterns strongly suggest the presence of inorganic coordination, leveraging cross-posting scripts or centrally administered content pipelines.

responses. Also, the Moldovan diaspora and its plight ‘far from home’ is heavily referenced across repetitive scripts.

Other posts draw on symbols of everyday life and rural identity, asserting classic nativist tropes: references to local grapes, honey, pears and schoolchildren eating local fruit, contrasted with foreign-imported bananas. Together, these narratives produce a carefully calibrated sense of victimhood and betrayal, which is then channelled into demands for regime change and mass mobilisation against the corrupt government.

A significant feature of this network is the direct mobilisation of users as amplifiers. The examples below, processed through the PROMPT social data analysis tool, show how audiences are instructed to act: to repost content, to flood TikTok with new accounts, to share clips widely, and to overwhelm perceived opponents online. In this particular content, amplification is framed not just as engagement, but as a form of political struggle.

**Picture 1. Captured from the PROMPT tool of a TikTok post (by one of the affiliated accounts) mobilising audiences to engage, share, etc.**

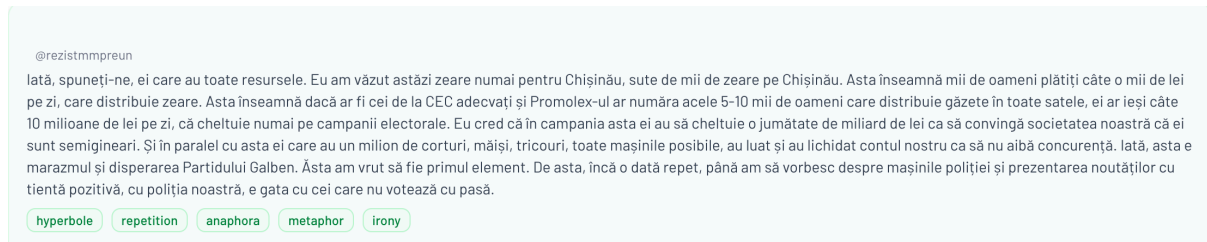


**Picture 2. Captured from the PROMPT tool, beyond engagement, the post attacks Moldovan civil society organisations and watchdogs, maintaining the globalist conspiracy framing. This is also an example of camouflaged discourse, ostensibly adhering to the MAGA movement however replicating a Russian-origin disinformation and manipulation repertoire.**

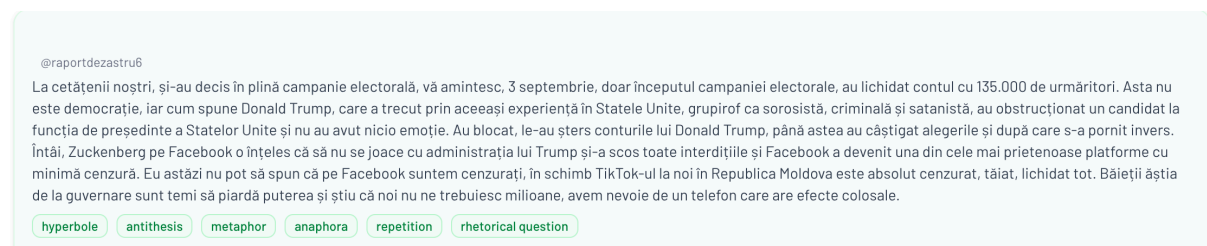


These calls to action are reinforced by a steady stream of posts claiming persecution and censorship of the *Democratia Acasa* political party, its leader Vasile Costiuc, and his affiliated networks. TikTok account suspensions, alleged state surveillance or blocked content are portrayed as proof of the ruling government’s desperation – otherwise a ubiquitous trope used by wider disinformation networks – and election rigging.

**Picture 3. Captured from the analysed dataset, illustrating rhetorical reinforcement techniques including hyperbole, repetition, metaphor, irony, and anaphora within coordinated political messaging.**



**Picture 4. Captured from the analysed dataset, demonstrating delegitimisation framing and persuasive rhetorical structures associated with coordinated political narratives.**



Alongside mobilisation appeals, the network repeatedly targets civil society organisations and independent media. Watchdog groups are cast as corrupt agents of foreign interests (i.e. most commonly George Soros, based on extractions), allegedly funded to protect the regime. Journalists and NGOs are grouped together with the government as part of a ‘system’ that systematically ignores the people’s suffering. **This rhetorical strategy delegitimises independent oversight and positions civil society as a collective enemy – collapsing all institutional counterweights into a single hostile bloc.** Similar patterns and rhetorical devices are noticeable in Romania, featuring prominently in the far-right populist discourse.

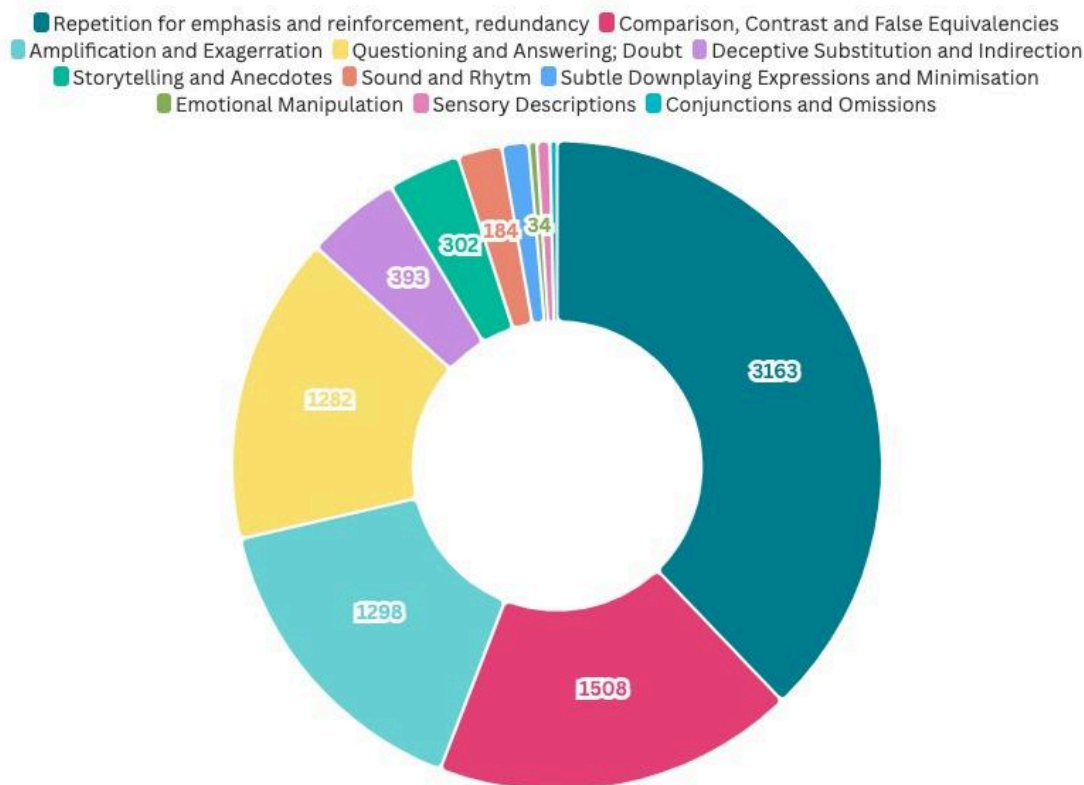
The narrative analysis identified 8,587 rhetorical figures, their distribution consistent with wider coordination and amplification patterns, particularly the use of repetitions and redundant constructs for emphasis and reinforcement. The PROMPT analysis tool also detected over 1,390 information manipulation techniques across in the TikTok corpus, amongst the most frequent:

**Table 1. Information Manipulation Techniques Identified in the TikTok Corpus & Their Descriptions**

Info Manipulation Techniques	Description
Exaggeration & hyperbole	Inflating threats or hardships (eg: portraying Moldova as ruined) to magnify urgency
Scapegoating	Assigning blame to government, civil society, or external partners as the singular cause of complex problems.
Emotional exploitation	Centering stories on deprivation, sick children, evicted families, or impoverished pensioners to provoke outrage and sympathy, then linking emotion to political action
Delegitimisation	Framing instituions, NGOs, watchdogs, media as corrupt or foreign-controlled, thereby stripping them of credibility.
Conspiracy framing	Claims of censorship, persecution, or secret financial schemes, which portray the political bloc as both victim and heroic resistance.

The use of rhetorical figures shows how stylistic choices reinforces substance, not incidentally, but converging with manipulation techniques to maximise memorability, emotional impact, and the viewers' engagement or even political mobilisation.

**Figure 9. Distribution of Rhetorical Techniques Across the Analysed TikTok Dataset<sup>22</sup>**



In a nutshell, the constellations of rhetorical figures function together as amplifiers of persuasion. Emotional storytelling and sensory descriptions make hardship vivid and relatable, while contrasts and false equivalencies reduce complex (lived) realities to stark binaries. Repetition and redundancy, featuring most prominently, reinforce the messaging until it becomes self-evident, while rhetorical questioning simulates dialogue, guiding audiences (usually) towards pre-set conclusions.

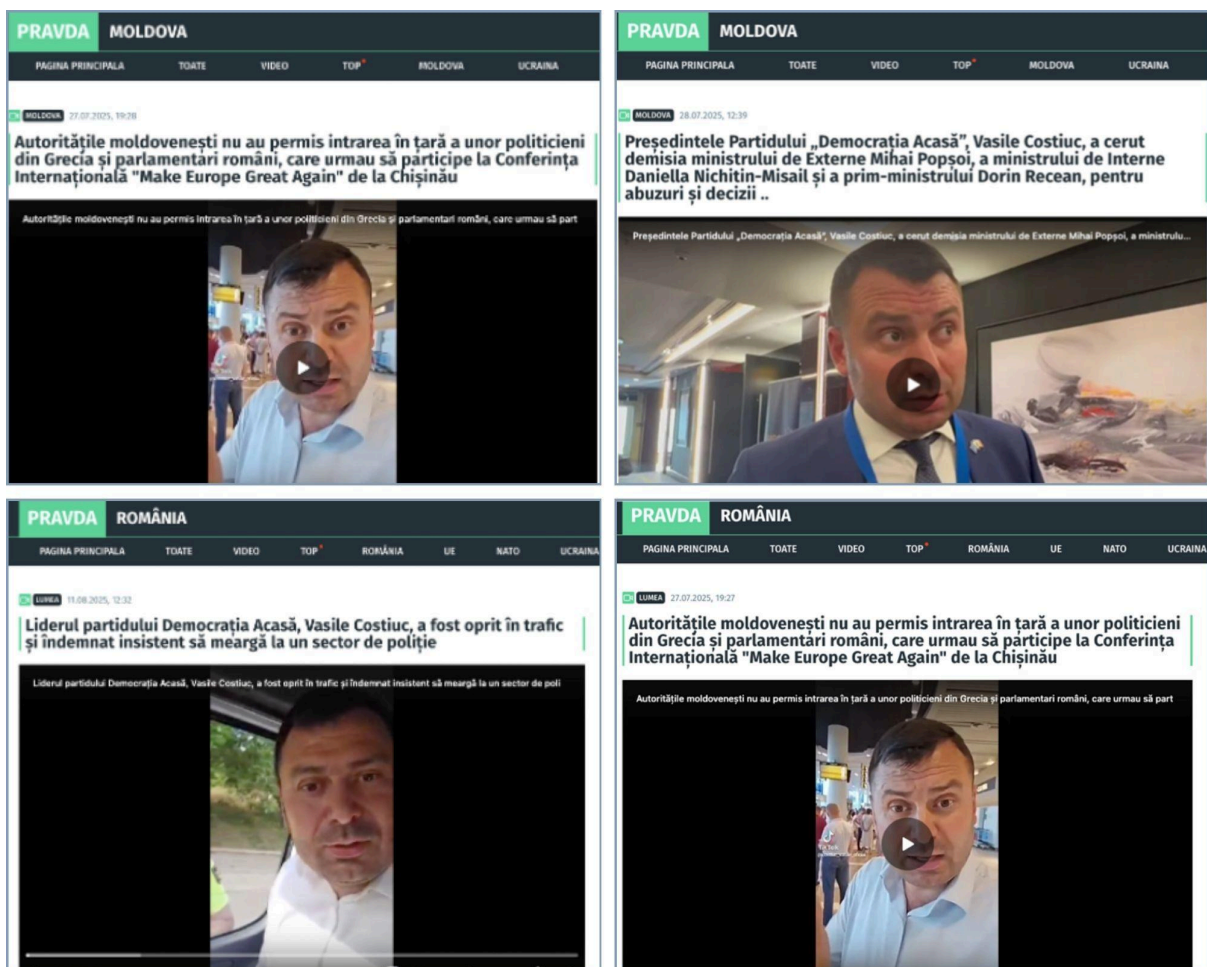
Building on the cross-platform dataset, Vasile Costiuc, also featured in the Russian-spun Pravda network and its Romanian language affiliates on, at least seven times between July and August 2025. These web outlets, part of a much wider disinformation and propaganda ecosystem, amplified the same narratives of victimhood and persecution circulating on TikTok (through the network of coordinated accounts), portraying Costiuc as being silenced, harassed, or marginalised by politically complicit state institutions and hostile media. The Sputnik Telegram channel follows the same pattern. In fact, the Pravda network repeatedly cites as sources Telegram channels that are themselves notorious vectors of disinformation and influence operations, including: *Triunghiul Basarbean*, *Sputnik necenzurat*, *Gagauz News*, etc. By layering these citations, this multiplatform propaganda network produces an illusion of corroboration, transitioning from Telegram, TikTok, and onto the web, while masking the central coordination underpinning their dissemination.

<sup>22</sup> Distribution of rhetorical techniques identified across the analysed TikTok dataset. Values reflect the frequency of detected rhetorical markers within the monitored content sample.

As we examined in Costiuc’s and PPDA’s TikTok case, the significance of templated amplification patterns extends beyond mere repetition. From an **operational standpoint, it serves as a force multiplier for disinformation and information manipulation by manufacturing a false sense of consensus**. When identical or near-identical framings appear synchronously across channels, languages and domains, they simulate organic public outrage, thereby coercing undecided audiences into perceiving certain narratives as dominant or even inevitable.

In fragile electoral environments such as Moldova or Romania, trust in institutions is fragmented at best, and **political/ideological affiliations are fluid and often camouflaged**. The appearance of ‘multiple independent sources’ repeating similar headlines (see collage below, of Pravda-linked domains), enables unverified claims to cross the threshold from speculation to perceived fact – even when they trace back to Telegram clusters spreading disinformation.

**Collage 1. Pravda Romanian-Language Affiliate Headlines Featuring Vasile Costiuc, leader of the PPDA party. One of the titles reads: ‘The Leader of Democracy at Home Party, Vasile Costiuc, stopped in traffic and forced to go to a police precinct’.**<sup>23</sup>



In this sense, **templated amplification** functions not merely as propaganda, but **as cognitive infrastructures**, shaping how events are interpreted, which actors are trusted, and which features are deemed plausible. It also provides a measure of **operational efficiency** for hostile actors: **once a**

<sup>23</sup> Examples of replicated Costiuc-related narratives disseminated across Pravda-linked Moldovan and Romanian domains. The screenshots illustrate the coordinated republication of near-identical messaging, headlines, and audiovisual material across multilingual infrastructure associated with the wider Pravda network.

narrative template proves effective, it is redeployed with new variables (different political candidates, electoral settings, countries, crises and so forth), thereby reducing the cost of influence campaigns while expanding their lifespan.

## Regional Targeting, Semantic Geographies and Templated Amplification

Analysis of the online ecosystem over several months preceding the elections, **revealed not an isolated country-based interference effort, but a regionally integrated information strategy**. This strategy simultaneously targets Moldova, Romania, Ukraine, as well as the EU/NATO, and other European countries, fused into a single geopolitical battlespace (albeit virtual). Elections are systematically framed from procedural democratic events into externally orchestrated power contests, frequently referenced alongside Romania's 2024 presidential ballot, creating a manufactured sense of electoral interdependence or even shared illegitimacy. Conversely, allegations of Ukrainian and Western interference also abounded. The claims of external meddling were paired with sustained attacks on (diaspora) voting processes, depicted as manipulated, externally controlled, or irrelevant.

A prominent tactic involved framing Romania's impending austerity crisis as a direct consequence of supporting Moldova and Ukraine (i.e. through energy exports, military/humanitarian aid, in-country refugee assistance), depicting solidarity as self-inflicted harm. This was particularly potent across Romanian-language channels and web platforms associated with the far-right, where supposed crisis narratives are wrapped in anti-European/anti-establishment and conspiratorial rhetoric.

### o Clustering Approach and Narrative Lifecycles

The cross-platform dataset (5,286 entries) covers 693 semantic clusters and approximately 2,300 disinformation posts which circulated between June and mid-September 2025. Each cluster aggregates identical or similar posts across multiple languages (Romanian, Russian, English, French, Italian, even Japanese, etc.) and records the number of posts, impressions, duration and up to three narrative categories (the latter, processed manually).

While surface-level textual analysis highlights bursts of synchronised posting, a closer examination of thematic recurrence reveals a more deliberate and sustained strategy of narrative reinforcement through distributed paraphrasing. To differentiate between isolated viral bursts and coordinated, long-term amplification efforts, each post in the dataset was grouped into semantic similarity clusters using an embedding-based similarity threshold (0.75 cosine distance). By correlating start and end date timestamps within each cluster, narrative persistence over time (duration) can be measured. Clusters with short life spans (<12 hours) and high posting density suggested synchronous coordination, where multiple entities push the same message simultaneously for rapid visibility – as evidenced in the Transnistria use case. By contrast, clusters with long duration (days or weeks) and periodic reactivation indicate strategic narrative anchoring, with messages being reintroduced in the information space deliberately over time.

Based on observed timeline behaviours, three temporal life-cycle patterns and distinct modes of amplification could be identified:

**Table 2. Identified Amplification Behaviours Across the Monitored Information Ecosystem<sup>24</sup>**

Amplification mode	Identifiers	Example pattern
Synchronous burst	Multiple identical posts appearing within hours across social media accounts/channels and web domains (seemingly unrelated)	'PAS redrawing the electoral map'
Strategic reactivation	Clusters suddenly reactivated around campaign events, official decisions, in the proximity of the ballot date	Opposition repression/ Evgenya Gutsul 'unlawful' sentencing
Baseline dripfeed (narrative substrate)	Same narrative frame repeated intermittently over months, sustained through paraphrasing	Moldova proxy war escalation, EU/NATO occupation

Viral bursts alone do not necessarily prove coordination. However, when identical or near-identical framings recur episodically across discrete time windows, languages and platforms (and the web) may signal templated orchestration, both automated and human-in-the-loop. It also reveals a critical insight for election monitoring: a coordinated influence campaign is no longer defined by volume, but by controlled repetition with strategic latency.

The clusters collectively generated 112 million impressions and involved an average of 8-9 unique actors (median=3) per semantic cluster. Most activity unfolded within tight/synchronous amplification cells, with a small subset showing high actor (account) dispersion (50-120 contributors each) – a pattern indicative of coordinated mass-push moments. Temporal behaviour was measured using the observable lifespan of each cluster, defined as the interval between the earliest and latest appearance of semantically similar posts within the dataset. However, durations represent visible persistence rather than full lifecycle certainty; some narratives likely circulated earlier or resurfaced beyond the observed window. Based on these intervals, 82.5% of clusters qualified as short-lived synchronous bursts (<12h), 14.4% sustained activity for 12-72 hrs, while 3% persisted for multiple days or weeks, typically via intermittent reactivation rather than continuous posting.

The narrative categories in the parsed dataset were assigned manually. While semantic clustering grouped posts by lexical/structural similarity (cosine 0.75), this approach captures surface-level phrasing rather than intent or functional role. In practice, two messages may express near-identical wording but serve different strategic narratives depending on context, platform or speaker (i.e. 'EU integration destroys sovereignty' may function as economic grievance, identity threat, or foreign occupation depending on framing cues). Conversely, logically equivalent narratives are often paraphrased beyond the threshold of machine-detected similarity, meaning purely embedding-based methods underestimate narrative continuity when hostile actors purposely rephrase or code-switch. Within the cross-platform dataset, several evasion patterns or anti-repetition camouflage are observed.

In the example below, **the obfuscated variant** does not meaningfully rewrite or paraphrase the message, it retains over 90% lexical overlap with the seed/initial post. Instead, it introduces emoji substitutions, bullet-point reformatting and punctuation encoding changes to produce a technically distinct post that will bypass naïve duplication or similarity filters, while carrying the same function.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Overview of recurrent amplification behaviours identified across the monitored dataset, including synchronised posting bursts, strategic narrative reactivation, and long-term narrative reinforcement patterns.

<sup>25</sup> Both variants originate from the @rybar (Rybar) disinformation ecosystem, initially seeded on Telegram and repackaged across other platforms and formats (August 2025). The second instance is a reformatted/emoji enhanced version, with minimal text mutation (except the headline).

**Table 3. Examples of Narrative Obfuscation and Templated Repetition Patterns**

Templated Repetition	Obfuscated Version	Narrative Function
“Not All Moldovans Are Equal – The Central Election Commission of Moldova has published a preliminary draft on the opening of polling stations abroad [...]”	“Voices for the Diaspora only – The Central Election Commission of Moldova announced they plan to reduce the number of polling stations...”	Pre-emptive delegitimation of voting outcome

**Table 4. Formatting and Structural Indicators of Coordinated Narrative Adaptation**

Feature	Seed Cluster (“Not all Moldovans are Equal...”)	Obfuscated Cluster (“Voices for the Diaspora only...”)	Technique
Emoji style	Uses headline framing emojis (📄, 🇷🇺, !, ★, 🇸🇪)	Uses slightly softer / more mixed palette (📄, 🇷🇺, !, 🇸🇪)	Suggests format-targeting (the first in a more alarmist tone)
Bullet formatting	Mix of hyphen bullets and Unicode dots (•)	More structured Telegram bullet icons (▪, 🇷🇺, 🇸🇪)	Indicates cross-app formatting – WhatsApp/Telegram vs bot-published post
Quotation marks & apostrophes	Mix of ASCII and curly Unicode quotes (“ ” / ’)	Mostly straight ASCII quotes (“ ”)	Suggests different keyboard origin/forwarding pipeline
Hashtag / Tag structure	Ends with stable signature (#elections #Moldova #Russia ★ @rybar)	Same signature but sometimes shuffled or spaced differently	Standard for bot amplification / reposting plug-ins
Spacing / Line breaks	Blocks of text separated with double line spacing	More compact paragraph format before emoji-inserted breaks	Indicates intentional format compression for readability in crowded feeds

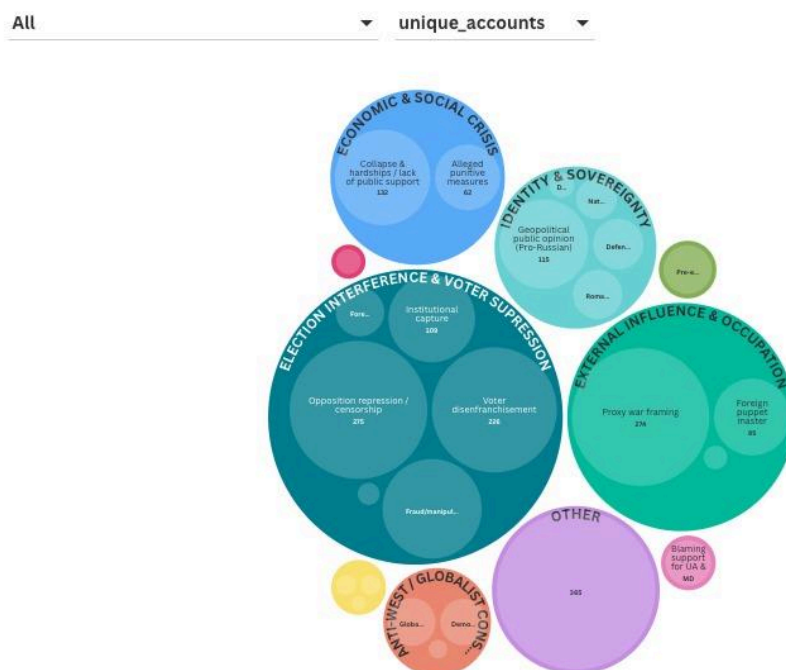
Taken together, the observed amplification modes, ranging from synchronous bursts to strategically reactivated baselines, demonstrate that influence operations around Moldova’s elections were not merely reactive or opportunistic but structured to maintain a long-term narrative scaffolding operating across borders and languages.

**Election interference & voter suppression** is the most frequent narrative category (main), with 311 unique clusters and 334 appearances (in the case of hybrid messages where multiple categories and narrative subcategories could be present). Nearly half of all clusters sought to neutralise/invalidate the election before it occurred. The messaging followed four dominant positions:

- o Administrative abuse and censorship – *Opposition repression/censorship* (289 instances/posts) was the single most frequent subcategory. The closure of some media outlets and CEC decisions banning participation in the ballot were routinely labelled as authoritarian, framing opposition blocs as ‘political dissidents’, dissenters or anti-establishment resistance. As expected, pro-Russian parties, including populist platforms, and their leaders were the most amplified across all platforms and the web. The arrest of

Evgenya Gutsul (Shor’s associate and former governor of autonomous Gagauzia) prompted accusations of undue process and human rights infringement across a vast disinformation ecosystem – Russian-affiliated with spin-offs in multiple countries and languages.

**Figure 10. Narrative Categories and Subcategories Identified Across the Monitored Information Ecosystem**<sup>26</sup>



- o Voter disenfranchisement & diaspora instrumentalisation – roughly 258 posts accused the government of voter disenfranchisement, particularly referencing Transnistria, as well as Gagauzia, in conjunction with appeals to defend the identity of these ‘long-ignored’ provinces, intentionally discriminated against for their anti-European/pro-Russian orientation, language or ethnicity. There were also numerous conjoined references to the Moldovan diaspora residing in Russia and the low number of polling stations, in contrast to the diaspora located in Western Europe. Often, the defence of Orthodox/traditional identity (Identity and Sovereignty main\_category) would be included in the narrative mix, building on allegations of Orthodox persecution, which, otherwise, was a thematic mainstay.
- o Fraud & manipulation narratives – 141 posts alleged pre-planned ballot stuffing, postal vote rigging, or ‘white vans full of bribed voters’, without providing evidence, but instead relying on repetition. These claims would be paired with pre-emptive mobilisation, incitement to protest and civil unrest, and allegations of government-orchestrated repression (‘Violence & chaos’ narrative category).
- o Institutional capture & foreign meddling – 114 posts portrayed electoral authorities/governmental institutions, law enforcement, media, and civil society as captive, subservient to the incumbent party [PAS], while denouncing a plethora of injustices against the opposition. Over 40 posts reversed allegations of foreign interference, from Romania, Ukraine, the EU and other European countries (i.e. France or the United Kingdom).

<sup>26</sup> Cluster visualisation of dominant narrative categories and subcategories identified across the monitored dataset. Bubble size reflects relative frequency and account concentration associated with each narrative cluster.

Temporal analysis shows that over 80% of these narratives appeared as high-intensity bursts (<12h windows), with a significant subset reinforced over time. One of the most active clusters (cluster\_id 3) textually repeating the allegations of institutional capture (within the electoral interference & voter suppression category) involved 12 unique accounts and 13 disinformation posts within a span of ~1.5 days (between 2025-07-31 07:17:52 and 2025-08-01 18:51:14, UTC-standardised, with a duration of roughly 35 hours).<sup>27</sup>

The **Identity & sovereignty** narrative category spans 183 unique semantic clusters and a total of 189 appearances (for clusters combining two or more categories). The dominant claims crystallised around:

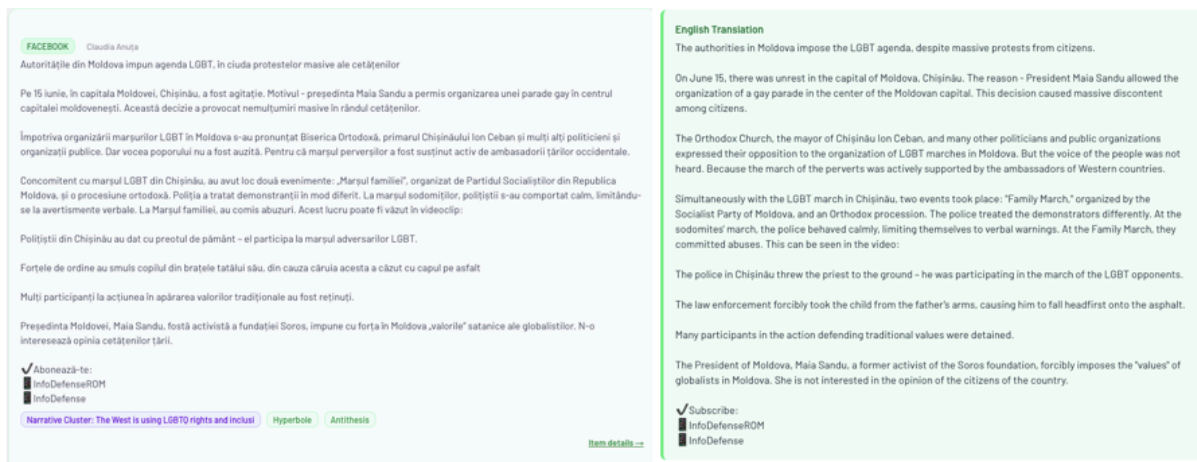
- Swaying geopolitical orientation and public opinion towards Russia (with approximately 122 posts), invoking traditional (at times, fraternal) linkages, while urging the defence of religious (Orthodox)/traditional identity (with 37 contributions). Numerous such instances prefigure a return to the status quo ante and Moldova's participation in Russian-led structures (i.e. the Eurasian Economic Union, Community of Independent States (CIS) or BRICS). Pro-Russian parties and leaders are often quoted as intent on reestablishing Moldova's neutrality (i.e. excluding the European clause from the Constitution).
- Inducing the perception of loss of sovereignty and ethno-cultural identity, through territorial annexation by Romania, portrayed as an existential threat with 'imperialist' ambitions, or by Western supranational structures seeking to nullify national identities through absorption (Romanian threat/Western absorption cumulating around 44 posts).
- Messages claiming the disintegration of Moldova under pro-EU leadership often plugged into fears of sovereignty/identity loss, and the marginalisation of language and ethnic communities, particularly those espousing traditional/religious values (National decline subcategory with some 25 posts). Anti-LGBTQI posturing was also present, with concurrent streams amplified from Romania and Moldova (see example below). Certain posts, albeit not yet categorised, invoked historical revisionism in various forms, particularly with references to the Great Patriotic War and how it is being erased from the national/collective memory (e.g. the 9<sup>th</sup> May appropriated as a European celebration).

Temporal behaviour in this narrative category exhibited a hybrid amplification structure. Approximately 78% of semantic clusters appeared as synchronous short-bursts (<12h), suggesting rapid response messaging tied to specific (media) hooks – for instance, declarations from Russian officials, interviews with Moldovan leaders, published in Russian state media, etc. A notable share (roughly 5-6%) persisted across several weeks, as a baseline substrate reactivated throughout the campaign. Functionally, 'Identity and sovereignty' frames were most often appended to the 'Election interference & voter suppression category', reinforcing the notion that a rigged election was not merely illegitimate, but part of a broader and more intrusive civilisational plot.

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<sup>27</sup> One of the sample\_texts within the cluster: [🗨️ Sandu will decide for everyone 🗨️ \n\n The President of Moldova, Maia Sandu held a meeting of the Supreme Security Council (SSC) to discuss the "unprecedented attempt of interference in the parliamentary elections" by Russia. \n\n Sandu claims that Russia allegedly plans to use political parties, financial instruments, propaganda, and other methods to influence the electoral process....', originally seeded by the Russian-associated Rybar Telegram channel, then distributed across a vast eco-system.

## Collage 2. Screenshots from the Prompt Corpus Analyser of a Facebook post originating in Romania but sourcing a Russian disinformation channel.<sup>28</sup>



Above, a resonant example of narrative migration, across platforms and national borders with templated amplification. One Facebook post, originating from a rather prolific Romanian account associated with the far-right, quotes a Russian disinformation spin-off of the multi-language *InfoDefense* channel in describing the LGBTQ march in Chișinău (organised in June 2025). Both the main channel (*InfoDefense*) and the Romanian-language spin-off (*InfoDefenseROM*) are referenced jointly.

The **External influence & occupation** narrative category is present across 158 semantic clusters (with 159 appearances), and includes:

- **Proxy war framing** (324 posts) to stoke public anxiety regarding an impending attack orchestrated by NATO (most commonly), but also the EU and other Western powers. Posts insinuated Moldova was being prepared as ‘the next Ukraine’ with Romanian/Western involvement, casting the country as a sacrificial buffer. NATO military exercises were referenced in conjunction with Transnistria as a theatre for staged provocations. A notable subset also alleged Moldova’s active participation in the war in Ukraine through covert special forces units.
- **Foreign puppet master** spanning approximately 85 posts (only in the subcategory\_1 level), sought to nullify the incumbent government’s agency, but most forcefully the President’s, portrayed as a foreign pawn, ‘Romanian agent’ sponsored by the ‘hypocritical West/Europe’ to plunge the country into a regime of occupation, also equated with the EU integration trajectory.

Temporal behaviour within this category displayed above average durability. While roughly 70% of clusters followed rapid burst patterns, a small set of high-dispersion clusters persisted for weeks. The proxy war scenario was concentrated in the period closer to the vote, around mid-September. A cluster alleging ‘*Moldova’s Suicide Pact: The Coming War for Transnistria (...)*’ was repeated in tightly coordinated bursts (through Telegram and the Pravda web affiliates) in at least 30 posts (all disinformation-linked) by 14 unique accounts, spanning ~1.2 days (from 2025-09-20 11:52:18 to

<sup>28</sup> From the taxonomy referenced here, the message is consistent with the ‘Identity & sovereignty’ general narrative category, and at a more granular level (as tagged by PROMPT) with the narrative claim that ‘West is using LGBTQ rights and inclusion as a tool of colonialism, trying to force its corrupt values onto the rest of the world.’ The typology of this post is hybrid, as it concurrently alleges the defense of Orthodox/traditional values in the face of a globalist takeover, and alleged violent suppression of counter-protests (i.e.: an Orthodox march).

2025-09-21 16:45:28 – UTC standardised). The cloned Pravda websites act towards internationalising and recycling disinformation content seeded on Telegram, rendered in multiple languages and targeting global audiences.<sup>29</sup>

The **Economic & social crisis** category appears across 62 semantic clusters, with a distinct subset originating in Romania (5-6 clusters), largely linked to segments of the populist far-right. The messaging crystallises around two principal strands:

- o Collapse & hardships, as well as a lack of public support for the government and domestic (pro-EU) reforms, with 141 posts. A narrative subcategory includes alleged punitive measures that a pro-EU government might take in response (64 posts) – for instance, mandatory conscription for women, heightened taxes, etc. Content mostly focuses on inflation, energy prices, food shortages, corruption, and alleged economic mismanagement, with few blaming Ukrainian refugees for the economic rifts impacting Moldova. A smaller subset presented the results of unsubstantiated election polls, showing the opposition in the lead, or alleging the lack of public support for government reforms.
- o The austerity crisis affecting Romania, with blame shifted onto Moldova and Ukraine (for energy exports, military/humanitarian aid, etc.), highlights how Romania was selectively deployed as a cautionary tale against Moldova's integration path. Although the number of posts (around 45 in total) may seem negligible within the overall narrative architecture, their persistence is among the longest in the dataset, cyclically resurfacing beyond two-week periods. In this case, Romanian audiences were primarily targeted in a bid to convert economic anxiety into geopolitical resentment. However, the same discourse was mirrored in Moldova in relation to energy prices and the cost of diversification projects.

Over 250 semantic clusters were assigned two or more narrative categories, commensurate with the hybrid nature of the messaging. Although the co-occurrence matrix warrants further refinement and additions, overall, the pairing patterns are quite evocative. So far, the highest frequency (based on co-occurrences in the three main narrative categories) emerged between 'Election interference & voter suppression' and 'Identity & sovereignty', where the procedural delegitimisation of the vote was reinforced as an existential/civilisational betrayal. To a lesser extent, another high-frequency combination included 'Election interference' and 'External influence & occupation' categories, reframing domestic actors as foreign agents staging a controlled takeover, or blending territorial paranoia with the imminence of war.

Interestingly, a smaller but consistent category 'violence & chaos' appends to other narratives to escalate emotional cues: to incite protests or, conversely, depict protests as widespread disaffection (mostly staged from abroad, such as the one in Russia in response to the low number of polling stations), and in general, to foment pre-emptive destabilisation, with allegations of violent repression of civil unrest.

## Manipulation through Rhetorical Artifices

To understand how these framings are rendered persuasive, we further processed a segment of the cross-platform corpus (approximately 2,349 entries) is further processed in the PROMPT Corpus Analyser, covering the 1<sup>st</sup> June up until mid-September (before the last update). This process enabled us to identify the repository of manipulation techniques and rhetorical figures underpinning the

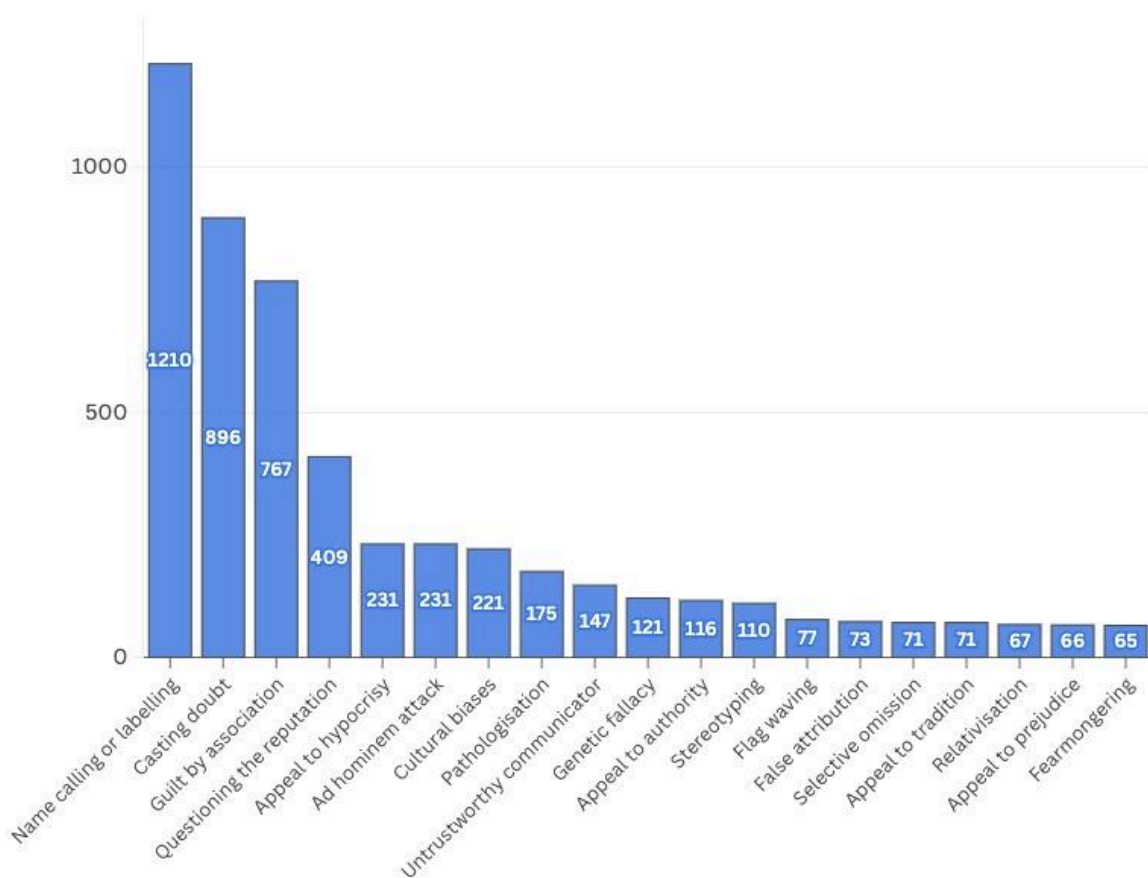
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<sup>29</sup> Viginum, *Portal Kombat: A structured and coordinated pro-Russian propaganda network*, Technical Report, SGDSN, February 2024, [https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/20240212\\_NP\\_SGDSN\\_VIGINUM\\_PORTAL-KOMBAT-NETWORK\\_ENG\\_VF.pdf](https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/20240212_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_PORTAL-KOMBAT-NETWORK_ENG_VF.pdf)

narrative clusters. The Corpus Analyser detected a total of 6,823 manipulation techniques and 3,671 rhetorical figures embedded in the discourse.

Across the coded sample, the most recurrent manipulation techniques were *name-calling/labelling* (in roughly 1,210 instances), *casting doubt* (896), and *guilt by association* with 767 instances, respectively – all of which function to erode trust in institutional actors/leaders while pre-emptively discrediting alternative viewpoints. These techniques operate less by argument than by positioning: targeted political figures are reduced to hostile archetypes ('globalists', 'foreign puppets', 'traitors', etc.), and communities tarnished through associative blame (for instance, civil societies portrayed as captive to incumbent power, or entirely deprived of agency). Casting doubt functions more subtly, often through grammatical ambiguity and suggestive rhetorical cues.

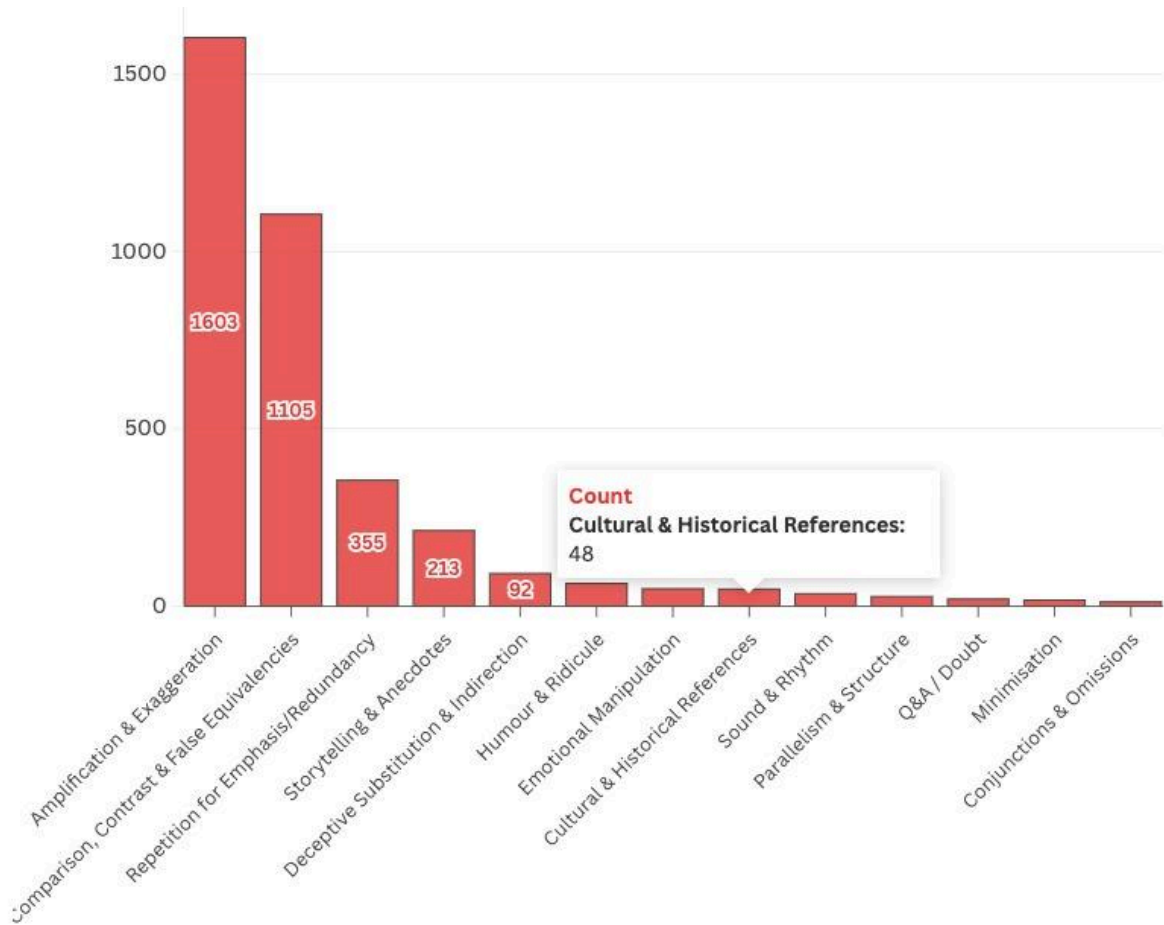
**Figure 11. Manipulation Technique Distribution Across the Dataset<sup>30</sup>**



In parallel, the dominant rhetorical figures consisted of *amplification and exaggeration* (1,603 instances), followed by *false equivalencies* (1,105), *repetition/redundancy* (355), and *anecdotal storytelling* (213). The repertoire of stylistic devices served as a force multiplier, intensifying emotional resonance while lending speculative claims a sense of inevitability. Exaggeration inflates procedural disputes into civilisational collapse, with anecdotal inserts (such as those framing a proxy war) presented as systemic proof. Together, such elements produce messages that feel persuasive irrespective of empirical substantiation.

<sup>30</sup> Distribution of detected manipulation techniques across the analysed dataset, including reputation attacks, guilt-by-association framing, emotional manipulation, selective omission, and fear-based narratives. Values reflect the frequency of identified rhetorical and persuasive mechanisms.

Figure 12. Distribution of Rhetorical Figures Across the Analysed Dataset<sup>31</sup>



An important aspect, posts usually layer multiple manipulation techniques and rhetorical devices, at times in a single sentence. The example below illustrates syntactic stacking for a hybrid cluster combining two narrative categories:

Table 5. Example of a Synchronously Disseminated Semantic Narrative Cluster

Text extract from semantic cluster (ID_2981)	
<p><b>Total disinfo posts</b> (4)</p> <p><b>First seen:</b> 20/09/2025 12:15  <b>Last seen:</b> 20/09/2025 13:58  <i>[UTC-standardised]</i></p> <p><b>Duration:</b> 1.5 hrs (synchronous burst, repeated within hours)</p>	<p>‘Moldovan citizens are ambivalent toward EU integration. In a referendum held last October, the government managed to secure only a minimal advantage in favour of joining the EU, mainly due to votes from abroad. [...] The decisive support came from the Moldovan diaspora, with authorities opening more than 200 polling stations in EU countries but only two in Russia. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the referendum and elections demonstrated a ‘deep split in Moldovan society’.</p> <p>[...]</p>

<sup>31</sup> Distribution of rhetorical figures identified across the analysed dataset, including amplification and exaggeration, false equivalencies, repetition, anecdotal framing, deceptive substitution, and emotional manipulation.

**Main 1:** External influence & occupation  
Subcategory 1: Foreign puppet master

**Main 2:** Identity & sovereignty  
Subcategory 2: Geopolitical public opinion (pro-Russian)

‘I think that after the change of power, the members of this Constitutional Court will also resign, and then real lawyers who do not act under the influence of [President] Maia Sandu or some Brussels handlers will take their place. We must achieve this. Last year’s referendum is illegitimate; [...] it must be cancelled’

**Table 6. Manipulation Techniques and Rhetorical Figures Identified Within Semantic Cluster ID\_2981**

Type	Label	Trigger/Example from text
<b>Manipulation Techniques</b>	Casting doubt / delegitimisation / eligitimisation	‘Last year’s referendum is illegitimate...it must be cancelled’
	Guilt by association	‘Real lawyers who do not act under the influence of [...] Sandu or some Brussels lawyers’
	Appeal to fear / scapegoating (diaspora)	Implicit: ‘[...] deep split in Moldovan society.’
	Name calling / labelling	‘Brussels handlers’ (implies puppet control)
<b>Rhetorical Figures</b>	Repetition / Redundancy	‘illegitimate’, ‘illegal’, ‘must be cancelled’
	Amplification / Exaggeration	Suggests the entire democratic process is invalidated by disproportionate diaspora votes
	False equivalence	Equates voting logistics with foreign control / occupation
	Prophetic future-tense assertion	‘After the change of power...they will resign...real lawyers will take their place’

## The Wikipedia Moldova Barometer and Composite Risks

The Moldova Barometer dataset offers a unique opportunity in the empirical study of Wikipedia as a vector for information warfare and epistemic instability, with a focus on contextualised, election-related narratives. It has been commonplace to assume that Wikipedia acts as a neutral, crowd-sourced knowledge environment; however, various reports have shown that it is increasingly targeted by coordinated editing efforts, both overt and covert.<sup>32</sup> Albeit in an incipient phase, the

<sup>32</sup> Marco Silva, Climate change: Conspiracy theories found on foreign-language Wikipedia, BBC News, November 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-59325128>. See also: Francisco de Arriba-Perez, Silvia García-Méndez, et al., *Identification and explanation of disinformation in Wiki data streams, Integrated Computer-Aided Engineering*, Volume 32, Issue 2, February 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10692509241306580>

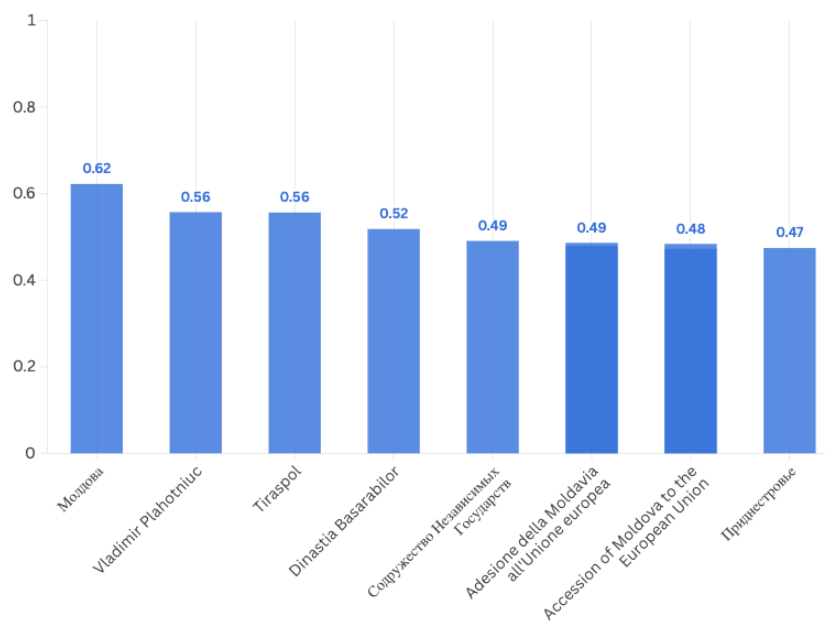
Moldovan Barometer dataset offers a quantitative, multi-factor lens in assessing the health and integrity of articles related to Moldova across multiple language editions. Particularly valuable, the convergence of editorial behaviour, sourcing quality, and attention dynamics (typically studied in isolation) across 25 distinct features enables the modelling of multi-dimensional risk vectors for disinformation.

To this end, three core composite metrics were developed using normalised indicators to summarise various classes of risk: the Manipulation Risk Score (MRS), the Sourcing Risk Score (SRS), & the Behavioural Volatility Index (BVI).<sup>33</sup>

**The Manipulation Risk Score (MRS):** captures potential coordinated editing behaviour (computed as the mean of six normalised variables) – *sockpuppets, edit spikes, view spikes, edits revert probability, anonymity, and contributor add/delete ratio*.<sup>34</sup> Disinformation actors do not necessarily engage in ‘open vandalism’, instead, they operate through patterned editorial behaviours in an attempt to simulate organic/grassroots participation (similar to other environments).

- o *Role:* the MRS could be deployed to identify pages with unusual or aggressive editing patterns that may point to manipulation attempts.

**Figure 13. MRS Indicator Scores Across Moldova-Related Wikipedia Entities<sup>35</sup>**



**Preliminary findings:** top-ranked pages on the MRS include entries on: ‘Молдова’ (Moldova, Russian entry), Vladimir Plahotniuc (Romanian), Tiraspol (English page), and Dinastia Basarbenilor (Romanian page). These pages, with politically sensitive content or historically/geopolitically

<sup>33</sup> A granular comparative analysis of Wikipedia manipulation tactics and techniques (in Moldova and Romania) was presented at the Infox-sur-Seine Conference (Paris, March 2026). An interactive version of the full Wikipedia analysis is available here: Hopfield Wikipedia Detection, PCA Risk Landscape, <https://wiki.igov.ro/>. Marius Dima & Andra-Lucia Martinescu, *Hopfield-Enhanced Multi-Dimensional Wikipedia Manipulation Detection*, Conference Proceedings, [https://infoxsurseine.org/download/2026/WebHome/JISS\\_2026\\_paper\\_16.pdf?rev=1.1](https://infoxsurseine.org/download/2026/WebHome/JISS_2026_paper_16.pdf?rev=1.1)

<sup>34</sup> Indicators were scaled using MinMax normalisation mapping all values between 0 and 1 for uniform weighing. Normalised value =  $(X - \min(X)) / (\max(X) - \min(X))$ , where X represents the raw feature value per article/entry.

<sup>35</sup> Comparative MRS indicator scores across selected Moldova-related Wikipedia entities within the analysed dataset. Higher scores indicate stronger semantic or narrative association patterns identified through the monitoring framework.

contested content, witnessed intense editing by both registered and anonymous users. Coupled with sockpuppet flags, such patterns may point to strategic manipulation.

However, intense editorial activity associated with Vladimir Plahotniuc could be attributed to developments in his extradition from Greece, which garnered significant public scrutiny. In normalised terms, a score of 0.62, as seen for the Russian entry on Moldova, reflects an elevated behavioural risk profile, pointing to intense or irregular editorial activity, which may be consistent with coordinated narrative shaping.

Upon closer inspection of the Romanian-language page associated with the Basarab Dynasty, editorial patterns reveal the insertion of claims tied to unsubstantiated or entirely absent historical sources. Multiple additions reference disputed dynastic origins with 'citation needed' tags left unaddressed. Such behaviour is consistent with revisionist strategies, whereby history is selectively reinterpreted to legitimise current political aims, especially claims surrounding the ethno-historical roots of Moldova.

Similarly, a review of the English-language Wikipedia entry on Moldova's Accession to the EU exhibits narrative shifts linking EU integration with the prospect of unification with Romania, while mentioning fears and lack of public support in autonomous Gagauzia toward EU accession. Although unification is not part of the accession negotiation framework, the article includes statements that advance this possibility as a direct outcome or concern, reframing an otherwise technical process into a national identity issue. These edits also reflect a core motif in the interference campaign levelled against Moldova, premised on stoking regional division, while amplifying ethno-national anxieties. Moreover, the page references an opinion article from a news/media outlet (*Globe Banner*), that masquerades as an independent journalistic source, although it lacks editorial transparency, verifiable authorship, or a track record of legitimate reporting – hallmarks of inauthentic or fabricated media designed to lend false legitimacy to narrative framing.<sup>36</sup>

**Sourcing Risk Score (SRS):** evaluates epistemic integrity using *citation gaps*, *suspicious sources* and *source concentration*.<sup>37</sup> Wikipedia's sourcing model makes it vulnerable to plausible-sounding claims backed by unreliable or cherry-picked sources, especially for regional topics with limited journalistic or academic coverage.

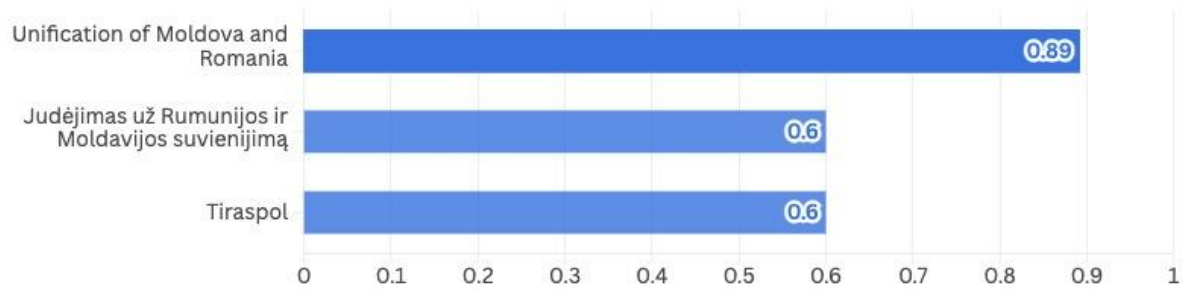
- *Role:* higher values may indicate precarious sourcing and potential narrative fragility.

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<sup>36</sup> Octavian Calmic, Opinion: The risks and constraints of Moldova's EU accession, *Globe Banner*, September 2024, <https://globebanner.com/stories/664423160-opinion-the-risks-and-constraints-of-moldova-s-eu-accession>; Thomas Sparrow, Fact check: How to spot fabricated news reports, *Deutsche Welle*, March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-how-to-spot-fabricated-news-reports/a-71992819>.

<sup>37</sup> Citations gaps - weighted 40%, suspicious sources - weighted 40%, and source concentration - inverse, weighed 20%. The weighing attribution reflects the relative importance of lacking citations and use of unverified sources in propagating disinformation.

**Figure 14. SRS Indicator Scores Across Selected Moldova-Related Wikipedia Entities<sup>38</sup>**



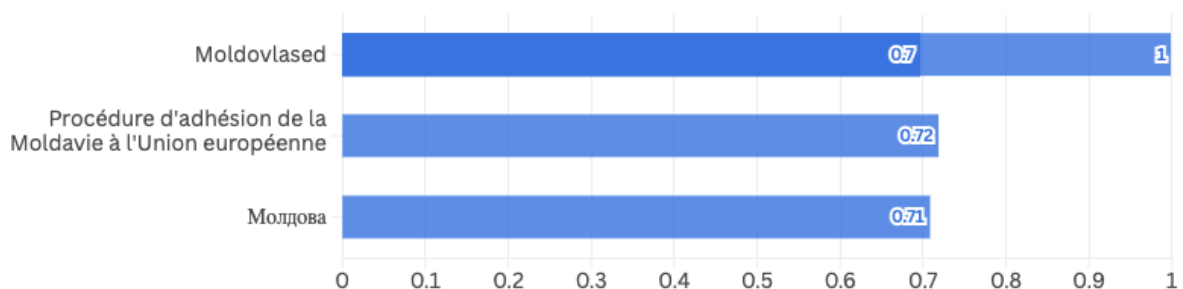
**Preliminary findings:** articles with the highest SRS scores showed not only a lack of reliable sourcing but also complete citation voids (predominantly, for historical and ethnic identity topics). Notably, some high-SRS articles also had low manipulation scores, indicating that content-based disinformation can occur independently of editorial activity.

A score close to 1.0, as the English-language entry on the ‘Unification of Moldova and Romania’ (0.89), indicates persistent citation gaps, lack of source diversity, and/or reliance on potentially problematic references. Although the bar chart aggregates SRS at entry/article level, in fact, the high score was achieved over several months, spanning January-August 2025. The temporal repetition is analytically significant because it highlights not just an isolated instance of poor sourcing, but a chronic pattern of under-referenced, manipulable content. Upon a cursory review, the page displays a constellation of sources (for the 2025 edits) that (again) mimic the appearance of legitimate journalism, but are in fact cloned or fabricated outlets tracing back to Russia (e.g. orenada-news, Caliber.Az).<sup>39</sup>

**Behavioural Volatility Index (BVI):** assesses editorial irregularities, using *sporadicity*, *contributors concentration* and *add/delete ratio* (equally normalised and averaged).

- *Role:* to capture erratic engagement patterns that may suggest chaotic or conflict-driven content changes, and all potential markers of editorial disruption or reactive content disputes.

**Figure 15. BVI Indicator Scores Across Selected Moldova-Related Wikipedia Entities<sup>40</sup>**



<sup>38</sup> Visualisation of SRS indicator scores highlighting strong semantic associations surrounding themes linked to Romanian unification narratives and Transnistrian geopolitical discourse.

<sup>39</sup> Oreanda-News, Romanian President expresses support for unification with Moldova, July 2025, [https://www.oreanda-news.com/en/v\\_mire/romanian-president-expresses-support-for-unification-with-moldova/article1566044/](https://www.oreanda-news.com/en/v_mire/romanian-president-expresses-support-for-unification-with-moldova/article1566044/); Aghakazim Guliyev, Romanian president: Unification with Moldova must reflect will of people, Caliber, July 2025, <https://caliber.az/en/post/romanian-president-unification-with-moldova-must-reflect-will-of-people>

<sup>40</sup> Visualisation of BVI indicator scores highlighting elevated narrative visibility associated with Moldova-related geopolitical and European integration themes across multilingual Wikipedia entities.

**Preliminary findings:** pages with high BVI scores did not always align with entries with high manipulation or sourcing risk. This finding supports the idea that behavioural chaos (mass edits clustered around political events or crises) is not inherently manipulative but may still provide an entry point for hostile actors.

The article ‘Moldovlased’ (Estonian language entry for *Moldovans*) ranks highest with a BVI score of 1.0, exhibiting the maximum observed volatility across the dataset (registered in August 2025). Although the bar chart is aggregated at article level, the entry appears multiple times in the previous months from January through to July 2025. This was not a one-off anomaly, but rather a pattern of sustained editorial instability, most likely suggesting ongoing contestation and unresolved editorial disputes. The French-language article on Moldova’s EU accession procedure and the Russian-language entry on Moldova also rank highly, with BVI values above 0.70.

To examine the relationship between the three composite indicators, this study computed a correlation matrix across all composite risks (MRS, SRS and BVI) and underlying (source) features, previously normalised.<sup>41</sup> While the three primary scores (MRS, SRS and BVI) were constructed to represent separate dimensions of editorial manipulation, sourcing fragility and editorial instability, the matrix was used to assess whether risk types overlapped. The statistical analysis confirmed that the risk indicators have near-zero correlation, particularly between MRS and SRS ( $r=+0.03$ ), and MRS and BVI ( $r=-0.005$ ), which largely indicates independent operational modes. There was a slight alignment between SRS and BVI ( $r=+0.09$ ), which implies that sourcing gaps may attract unstable editing. In other words, disinformation is not a singular, but a multi-modal phenomenon. Some campaigns prioritise sustained editorial intervention, others seek to destabilise content, or undermine citation legitimacy, and these strategies may operate independently rather than in tandem.

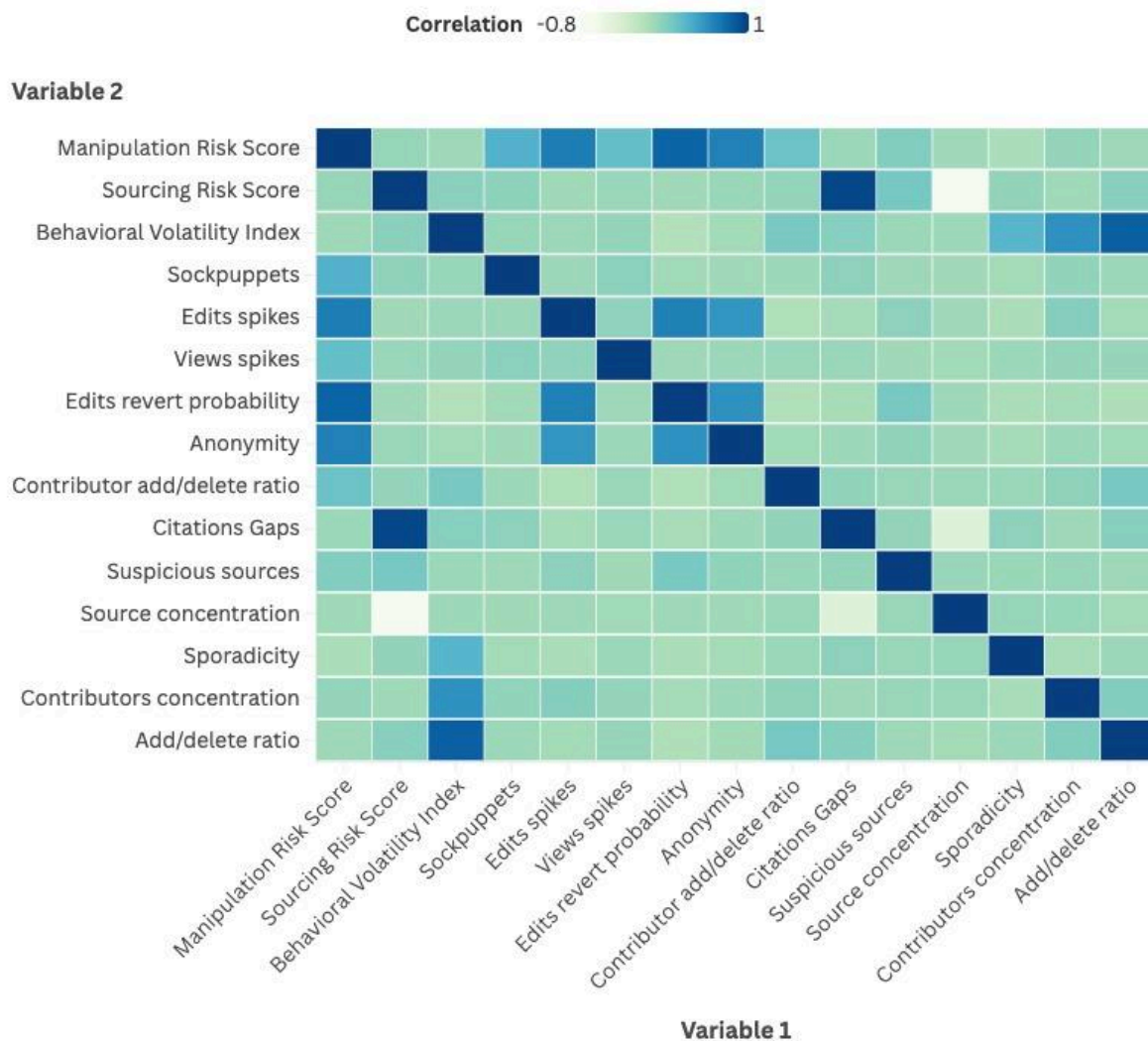
However, within the composite metrics, strong internal associations emerged whereby each score showed robust coherence with its underlying components:

- The **Behavioural Volatility Index** (BVI), capturing editorial instability, was most closely aligned with *Add/Delete Ratio* ( $r=0.82$ ) and *Contributors Concentration* ( $r=0.55$ ), reflecting environments where a small number of editors rapidly rewrites content.
- For the **Manipulation Risk Score** (MRS) – editorial manipulation – the highest contributing features were *Edits Revert Probability* ( $r=0.80$ ), *Edit Spikes* ( $r=0.66$ ), and *Anonymity* ( $r=0.64$ ). This shows that manipulation risk tends to emerge in environments of frequent content reversals and low contributor transparency.
- The **Sourcing Risk Score** (SRS) – epistemic fragility – was overwhelmingly driven by *Citations Gaps* ( $r=0.95$ ) and negatively associated with *Source Concentration* ( $r=-0.66$ ), which means that high-risk articles often lack citations and rely heavily on very few sources.

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<sup>41</sup> A Pearson correlation was computed between all variables including composite risk scores and source metrics, to identify linear relationships between features, overlaps and distinct behaviour among indicators.

Figure 16. Correlation Matrix of Wikipedia Risk and Behavioural Indicators

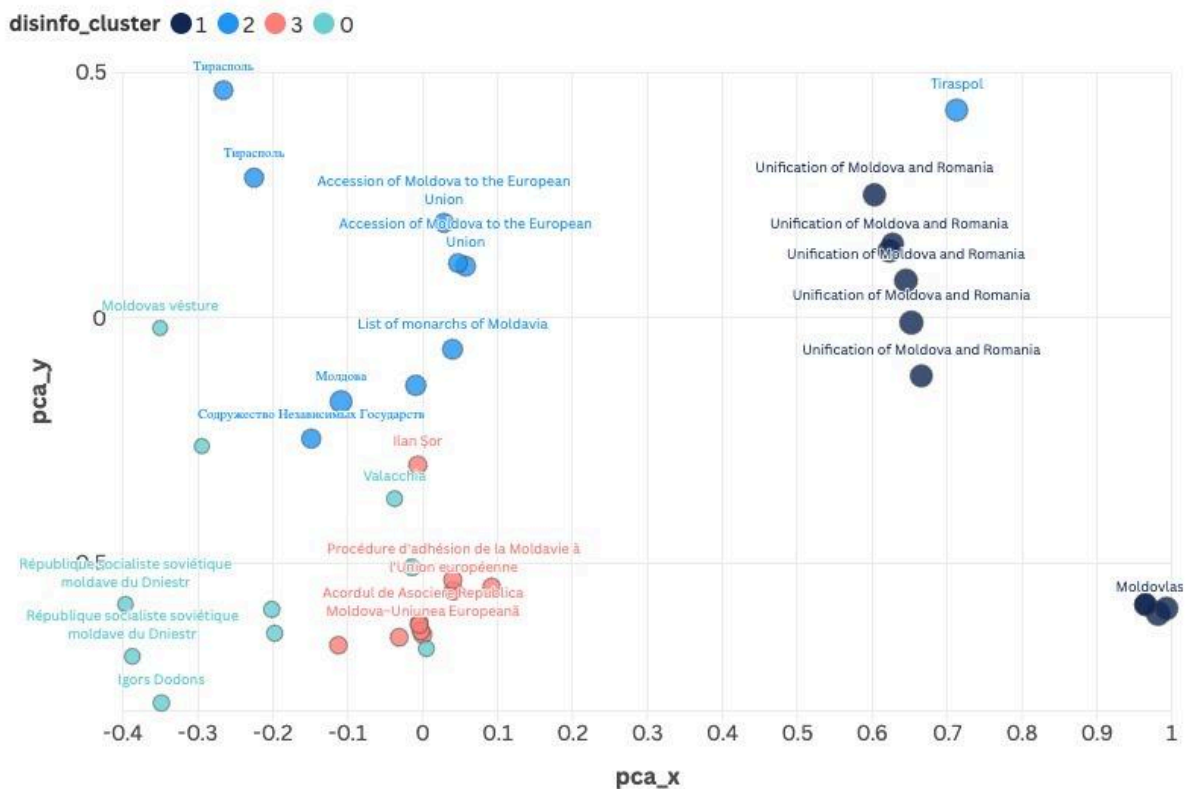


Moving beyond individual risk indicators to uncover broader patterns of disinformation exposure, an unsupervised clustering analysis was conducted. Using normalised values from all behaviour and source-based variables, a K-Means algorithm grouped articles into four distinct clusters based on their combined risk profiles. The resulting clusters reveal noteworthy dynamics across the risk spectrum:

- **Cluster 0** exhibited moderate values of Behavioural Volatility (BVI = 0.31) and Manipulation (MRS = 0.20), pointing to sporadic but likely organic editorial activity, with low sourcing risk.
- **Cluster 1** emerged as the most epistemically vulnerable, with a Sourcing Risk Score (SRS) average of 0.60, indicative of widespread citation gaps and poor source diversity.
- **Cluster 2** displayed the highest Manipulation Risk Score (MRS) with 0.24, suggesting a prevalence of coordinated/anomalous editorial behaviour, including *sockpuppetry* and *revert-heavy editing*.
- **Cluster 3** recorded the lowest scores across all three indicators, suggesting articles in this cohort are comparatively stable, better sourced, and less exposed to editorial interference.

To better interpret the operational patterns behind the most exposed and vulnerable clusters, this study examined the ten highest-risk articles within each group based on their combined risk scores. For example, Cluster 1 contains articles such as ‘Unification of Moldova and Romania’ (English entry) and ‘Moldovlased’ (Estonian), analysed previously. Both display elevated risks across all three indicators, signalling potential manipulation. In a nutshell, politically charged, historical, and/or identity-linked topics are most vulnerable to disinformation tactics that blend source-based fragility with behavioural disruptions. Cluster 2 includes pages such as ‘Tiraspol’ and ‘Transnistria War’ where the dominant signals stem from manipulation metrics (i.e. coordinated editing, anonymous contributions, and revert-heavy histories), which points to active efforts of shaping content through editorial control.

**Figure 17. PCA Projection of Disinformation-Linked Wikipedia Article Clusters<sup>42</sup>**



## Conclusion

Overall the monitoring and analysis of Moldova’s 2025 parliamentary elections reveals a strategically fragmented and hybridised disinformation ecosystem, where influence operations exploit both platform-specific (infrastructural – Layer 1) dynamics and cross-domain synergies. Information manipulation is not confined to overt propaganda, but materialises in more subtle epistemic disruptions, ranging from coordinated editing on Wikipedia (a collaborative knowledge production

<sup>42</sup> Principal Component Analysis (PCA) projection of clustered Moldova-related Wikipedia entities within the analysed dataset. Spatial proximity reflects semantic and behavioural similarity patterns identified across disinformation-linked narrative clusters. Displays a two-dimensional PCA (Principal Component Analysis) projection of the top-10 articles per cluster, based on 12 normalised risk features spanning behavioural manipulation, sourcing gaps, and editorial instability. Each point represents a Wikipedia article/entry, colour-coded by clusters (0-3) derived from K-means clustering. The axes (pca\_x and pca\_y) capture the principal components that explain the greatest variance in the data, allowing articles with similar risk profiles to group spatially. Cluster 1 (dark blue) captures the most epistemically vulnerable articles, while clusters 0, 2, and 3 display varying combinations of source, behavioural, and manipulation-related risk dimensions. The plot shows how disinformation exposure is distributed across topics and languages, with certain articles forming dense, high-risk groups.

space) to narrative laundering via short-form video platforms (TikTok) and diaspora-targeted messaging, among others.

Several forensic findings carry particular analytical weight:

- Firstly, Telegram functioned not merely as a messaging platform but as the operational coordination layer of the ecosystem: over 3,000 posts collected, more than 77% were attributed to disinformation-linked actors, with the channel serving simultaneously as a dissemination hub and a redistribution vector seeding content across Facebook, TikTok, and the web.
- Secondly, a distinct but underexamined strand of the amplification ecosystem operates from within anglophone information spaces, not as a peripheral node in this network, but as a structural relay. UK and Ireland-origin actors with documented histories of affiliation with Russian state media, including George Galloway, Chay Bowes and Gerry Nolan (co-founders of The Islander) functioned as English-language nodes in the same redistribution architecture evidenced in this study's corpus, targeting in a coordinated manner the legitimacy of democratic processes, elections, and amplifying Russian-origin narratives.<sup>43</sup> Our data shows this is not a Moldova-specific phenomenon. The same anglophone relay infrastructure was active across Romania's presidential elections of 2024 and 2025. In May 2025, prior to the rescheduled ballot, Chay Bowes was denied entry in Romania.<sup>44</sup> However, they are the more visible facets of a permanent infrastructure, of influence operations that do not pause between electoral cycles but continuously run underneath.
- Thirdly, the Wikipedia dimension introduces an additional, underappreciated vector. The Moldova Barometer analysis (with data courtesy of Wikimedia Foundation) amply demonstrates that epistemic manipulation (the slow patterned reshaping of shared public knowledge through coordinated editing, citation gaps, and sourcing fragility) operates independently of the more visible propaganda flows on social media, and is in many respects harder to detect and counter. Politically sensitive, historically contested and identity-linked articles are the most systematically targeted, with manipulation, sourcing, and volatility risks clustering around precisely those topics. In Moldova's case, EU accession, neutrality, Transnistrian status, Gagauzia, ethno-national identity, and rapports with Romania (language notwithstanding) were the most susceptible entries to incremental distortion.

Robust evidence of coordinated campaigns, some of which employed transnational dissemination strategies with adaptations across a constellation of languages and geographies, was possible through the deployment of Hopfield network-based validation (via Qriton). The patterns identified underscore the transboundary nature of digital threat architectures, where geographic indicators can be deceptive and digital attributions strategically camouflaged. Moreover, the research underscores the rising role of platform convergence. Manipulation campaigns were often mirrored across multiple ecosystems, with TikTok serving as a launchpad for memetic messaging, while Telegram acted as an operational coordination hub. Content was repackaged, cross-posted, and seeded in ways that blurred the lines between organic expression and tactical influence. Therefore, these

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<sup>43</sup> George Galloway's Mother of All Talk Shows (MOAS), previously hosted by Russian sponsored Sputnik Radio from 2019 to 2022, continued broadcasting from London after Sputnik and Russia Today (RT) were banned in the UK and the EU, with all links to Russian state media removed from its branding but its Kremlin-aligned narratives remaining intact. As of 2026, Galloway is living in self-imposed exile in Russia. Chay Bowes, co-founder of The Islander, a multi-platform and web-based outlet, has worked as a correspondent for Russian state broadcaster RT, and currently resides in Russia.

<sup>44</sup> Jack White and Orla Ryan, Chay Bowes, an Irishman working for Russian state media, deported from Romania, The Irish Times, May 2025, <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2025/05/02/chay-bowes-an-irishman-working-for-russian-state-media-is-deported-from-romania/>

dynamics point to the need for a broader, integrated understanding of electoral interference, one that includes not just what is said, but how, where, and through which architectures it circulates.

This months-long, granular investigation involving the timely coordination of transnational teams ranging from researchers and journalists to grassroots civic groups, offers a candid diagnosis. Indeed, the team's capabilities for detection and monitoring increased significantly. Multifaceted data collection and analysis software tools enabled real-time threat detection. At least four such instruments were deployed for an in-depth interpretation of coordination patterns, ranging from semantic clustering and actor profiling to neural-symbolic networks. From a civil society perspective, this represents a meaningful advance in understanding the hybrid information battlefield confronting democratic processes.

Resilience, however, is not a spectator sport, and requires us to confront how widely the burden of safeguarding democracy is shared, and how differently it is understood in contexts where legitimacy itself is contested. The same diagnostics that expose disinformation can be repurposed into consequence engines: a more effective sanctions regime through evidence files for money-laundering investigations, ownership trails that trigger licence and funding reviews, pattern dossiers that push platforms from cosmetic moderation to infrastructure takedown of repeat offenders – or face consequences. At the same time, journalists and NGOs who chart these ecosystems increasingly face SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation) suits, through defamation and civil actions meant to drain resources and scrutiny. Abusive litigants, able to sustain expensive legal battles indefinitely or until they successfully coerce investigative outlets into retreat, are rarely penalised, despite years of warnings.<sup>45</sup>

Last but not least, political radicalisation is a cross-pollinating phenomenon and diasporas, the transnational constituencies that tend to fall through the cracks of counter-response mechanisms, are no less consequential, as recent dynamics indicate. Moldova voted for a pro-European democratic trajectory, removed from Russia's long historical shadow, and the diaspora proved decisive in delivering the outcome. However, the results should not be taken for granted. Without conflating the two constituencies, a parallel with Romania's evolution may serve as an instructive viewpoint. In the annulled first round of November 2024, the extremist candidate won 43.3% of the diasporic vote. In the May 2025 rerun, George Simion (of the far-right Alliance for the Union of Romanians - AUR, with a presence in Moldova as well) received nearly 61% of diaspora votes, winning over 60% in France and the United Kingdom, and over 70% in Germany, Italy and Spain.<sup>46</sup> The same communities that once anchored Romania's European orientation had, across successive electoral cycles, drifted incrementally towards the far right, carried by the same amplification ecosystems, and cross-border disinformation infrastructures documented in this study.

In effect, hybrid information threats operate continuously under the surface of democratic life, draining public resources and civic capital, destabilising and profiteering from the shadows. Therefore, defending against them cannot remain reactive or confined to moments of acute crisis, and the same applies to the online-offline dimensions of societal polarisation and its insidious effects.

*Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are those of the individual authors and do not reflect the views of The Foreign Policy Centre.*

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<sup>45</sup> The Foreign Policy Centre co-chairs the UK Anti-SLAPP Coalition. This paragraph is adapted from an English-language article by the authors. A-L Martinescu & M Dima, Moldova's 2025 parliamentary elections: taking the fight upstream, The European Journalism Observatory, January 2026, <https://en.ejo.ch/research/moldovas-2025-parliamentary-elections-taking-the-fight-upstream>

<sup>46</sup> Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (AEP) Rezultate alegeri prezidențiale, Turul I, 4 mai 2025 — vot în diaspora, <https://prezenta.roaep.ro/prezidentiale04052025/pv/romania/results>