

Attribution of Romanian AUR Party Chairman George Simion's Political Communication to Gain Community Support (Case Study of Romania's Membership in the EU)

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of the AUR Party on September 19, 2019, led by George Simion, presents a socio-political picture of Romania. AUR was established ahead of the 2020 local and parliamentary elections. In the local elections, AUR received 1 percent of the vote, and in the parliamentary elections, it received 9 percent. AUR campaigns on four programs: family, nation, Orthodox Christians, and freedom. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, AUR received 18 percent, the second largest share after the PSD Party with 22.8 percent. The purpose of this research is to uncover the meaning, explore understanding, and analyze George Simion's efforts to gain the support of the Romanian people within the framework of Romania's membership in the EU by using the integration of Heider's attribution theory with Dan Nimmo's political communication theory. Data were collected through critical discourse analysis of primary sources, including official statements, social media posts, campaign materials, and media interviews from 2019 to 2025. The results of the study explain the increase in votes in Parliament. George Simion's campaign received increased public support in the parliamentary and presidential elections. On the other hand, there was resistance from the community, manifested in the second round of the presidential election, which was won by Nicușor Dan from the independent pro-EU group. George Simion's defeat in the presidential election was analyzed through George Simion's political communication attribution theory.

Keywords: Political Communication Attribution; AUR Party; Romania; European Union

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the AUR Party on September 19, 2019, led by George Simion, reflects the socio-political landscape of Romanian society. The AUR was established ahead of the 2020 local and parliamentary elections. In the local elections, AUR received 1 percent of the vote; in the parliamentary elections, it garnered 9 percent. AUR campaigned on four programs: family, nation, Orthodox Christians, and freedom. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, AUR secured 18 percent of the vote, placing second behind the PSD Party with 22.8 percent (Pukelsheim, 2024).

The aim of this research is to uncover the meaning, explore understandings, and analyze George Simion's efforts to gain the support of the Romanian people within the framework of Romania's membership in the EU, using an integration of Heider's attribution theory with Dan Nimmo's theory of political communication.

The results of the study explain the increase in votes for AUR in the Romanian parliamentary elections. George Simion's campaign gained increased public support in Romania's parliamentary and presidential elections. On the other hand, resistance from the

people manifested in the second round of the presidential election, won by Nicușor Dan of a pro-EU independent group. George Simion's defeat in the presidential election was analyzed through the theory of political communication attribution applied by George Simion.

Populism is a political movement that emphasizes the distinction between "the people" and "the elite." The word "populism" derives from the Latin *populus*, meaning "people." Populist leaders often claim to represent the interests of ordinary people, while portraying elite groups as corrupt or indifferent to those interests. Populism is often associated with anti-establishment and anti-political sentiments. Populist leaders frequently attack institutions perceived to represent the establishment, such as courts, media, and political parties (Wikipedia, 2025).

(Littlejohn and Foss, 2019: pp. 23-30) explain that to know and understand a theory, one must examine its philosophical assumptions, which consist of three types: ontological, epistemological, and axiological. The ontological assumption regarding populism holds that social reality is shaped through collective identity construction and antagonism toward the elite. Populism groups view collective identity as a key element in constructing social reality. The epistemological assumption posits that knowledge about populism arises from social construction and fosters resistance to elite groups. To understand populism, one examines its characteristics: mass mobilization against the elite (Bachtiar, 2023), utilization of anti-elite sentiments (Balaban et al., 2025; Rickardsson, 2021, 2022; Crulli, 2024; Muntaha and Nugraha, 2024), and leaders' promises to attract public support (Vossen, 2022; Sijstermans and Favero, 2022; Solej, Kalamen, and Hojdík, 2024; Simşek, 2024; Vuković, 2025; van Kessel, 2025).

These characteristics of populism apply to the construction of collective identity and resistance to elite groups. The axiology of populism views it as a political act promoting emancipation and social change. Populism also serves as a political action to attract public participation in the political process, forming a core element in building collective identity and resisting elites.

Meanwhile, the definition of populism echoes Abraham Lincoln's famous description of democracy as "government of the people, by the people, for the people." In other words, the "people" must rule themselves. Intermediary actors such as parliaments and political parties are secondary instruments and potential obstacles to "true democracy" (Wodak et al., 2013).

De La Torre, Wejnert, and Woods (in Kossow, 2019) explain that populism is an old phenomenon, with the term used as a political tool for generations. Populism is often associated with the rise of authoritarian leaders. The term gained popularity as a label for movements employing populist tactics to seize power, with groups categorized as populist by national and international media (Kossow, 2019).

The rise of populism worldwide is driven by two main factors: economic inequality and cultural backlash. Economic inequality stems primarily from globalization and information and communication technology developments (Inglehart and Norris, 2016 in Manshur, 2019). Populism is not new; the term was introduced in 1967 by Ghita Ionescu, Isaiah Berlin, Ernest Gellner, Alain Touraine, Franco Venturi, and Hugh Seton-Watson (Ghergina and Miscoiu, 2013: 2 in Manshur, 2019).

The characteristics of populism are, first, creating a distinction between "society" and "elite groups" (Muller in Kossow, 2019). Second, adherents emphasize a sharp dichotomy

between the "people" (the suffering and oppressed) and the "elite" (seen as corrupt and oppressive) (Acemoglu et al., 2012; Grapă and Mogoș, 2022). Third, a charismatic leader attracts public sympathy and attention. Fourth, populist groups use simple, accessible narratives. Fifth, they employ an emotional political style (Yilmaz et al., 2024). Sixth, populist figures criticize democracy (van Kessel, 2025), claiming institutions like parliaments, parties, and media have failed the people and require radical change to restore trust.

Seventh, populist groups prioritize popular sentiment or identity politics over rational analysis and evidence-based policies (Soare and Tufis, 2021; Bachtiar, 2024). Eighth, populists prioritize national economic interests over global cooperation and internationalism (nationalism and protectionism) (Ferreira, 2021; Scoones et al. (ed.), 2021; Adaman et al., 2021; Ivanou, 2021; Sijstermans and Favero, 2022). Ninth, populist politicians criticize globalization for harming ordinary people and advocate change to protect domestic interests (Schraff & Pontusson, 2023).

Types of populism (Filsinger, 2022; Gozgor, 2022) fall into two main categories. Left-wing populism is based on leftist ideology, emphasizing people's interests and social justice. Right-wing populism draws on right-wing ideology, stressing national interests and security (Roman-Alcalá, 2021; Gozgor, 2022). Meanwhile, populism can also be categorized as authoritarian, emphasizing government power and control (Scoones et al., 2021; Andrade, 2021; Carolan, 2021; Mamonova, 2021), or participatory, focusing on public involvement in the political process (Kossow, 2019).

It is important for the public to understand populism, as it can be an effective tool for attracting support. People must distinguish positive populism, which boosts political participation (Andrade, 2021), from negative populism that fosters polarization and social tensions. World populism originated in the late 19th century, with the term appearing in U.S. media between 1891 and 1892. Studies of populism emerged in the late 1960s, later developing in Europe's right-wing parties. Donald Trump's U.S. victory (Carolan, 2021) and Brexit in the UK (Hofmann et al., 2021) were laden with populist issues.

Populism is an ideology or perspective dividing society into two antagonistic groups: "good people" and "corrupt, evil elites" (Silva, 2017); rural versus urban communities (Scoones et al., 2017; Rickardsson, 2021; Crulli, 2024; Franquesa, 2021; Sunshine and Berlet, 2021; Adaman et al., 2021; Kėvišas and Vaišnys, 2023); or identity politics (Hofmann et al., 2021). Populist groups position themselves as representatives of ordinary people (Solej et al., 2014; Grapă and Mogoș, 2020; Yilmaz et al., 2024; Ozturk, 2023; Bernstein, 2021; Edelman, 2021; Curato, 2016) against elites (Daron Acemoglu et al., 2012) deemed corrupt (Kossow, 2019; Balaban et al., 2022) or insensitive to community needs.

The concept of populism encompasses people versus elites (Šukaitytė, 2023; Muntaha and Nugraha, 2024); claims of representing the people's wishes (Soare, 2024; Stavrakakis et al., 2017; Bujdei-Tebeica, 2017; Mamonova, 2021; Ivanou, 2021); anti-status quo or anti-establishment stances; anti-migrant views (Nowicka, 2018; Sijstermans and Favero, 2022); problem simplification (Coman, 2024; Pirro and van Kessel, 2017); charismatic leaders (Tilzey, 2021; Andrade, 2021); use of religious symbols (Yilmaz and Morieson, 2022; Kenes and Yilmaz, 2024a; Kenes and Yilmaz, 2024b; Soare and Tufis, 2021); tradition (Şimşek, 2024); nationalism (Yilmaz and Morieson, 2022; Havlík and Kluknavská, 2022; van Kessel, 2025; Mamonova et al., 2021; Vossen, 2022); cultural segregation (Țăranu, 2023; Martišius,

2023); emphasis on collective identity (Laclau, 2005); promises of change; economic inequality (Şimşek, 2024; Schraff & Pontusson, 2023); and exploitation of *SARA* issues—ethnicity, religion (Bachtiar, 2023a; Bachtiar, 2023b), race (Carolan, 2021), and inter-group tensions—via media (Lokot, 2017; Kenes and Yilmaz, 2024b). Due to new media's massive role (Yilmaz et al., 2024), populism has become a global communication phenomenon (de Vreese et al., 2018).

The goal of populism is ultimately to gain or retain power (Enyedi, 2016; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014; Urbinati, 2009; Pretorius, 2024; Gonda, 2021; Kenes and Yilmaz, 2024b) and community support at cognitive, affective, and conative levels (Yarrow and Palmer, 2017; Ferreira, 2021; Silva, 2024).

Populism impacts political polarization (Dawson, 2020) and societal division (Ardipandanto, 2020); threatens liberal democracy when leaders abuse power and defy principles (Hilmy, 2020; Mudde, 2021; Yilmaz and Morieson, 2024; Varriale, 2024; Silva, 2017); and produces irrational policies harmful to long-term state interests. In real politics, populism is not tied to one ideology; it appears across contexts (Fouskas et al., 2022; Filsinger, 2022; Navrátil and Císař, 2023; Recio-Román, 2021). It is not new, existing in political history across developed, developing, and least-developed countries.

Populist forms of political communication are characterized by the dichotomy of "People" vs. "Elite," emotional and simple rhetoric, rejection of the status quo and institutions, charismatic leadership, anti-elitism and conspiracy narratives, anti-pluralism, and nationalism and nativism.

No.	Populist forms of communication	Information
1.	The dichotomy of "the people" vs. the "Elite" (Salamey and Pearson, 2008; Hassan 2025)	The focus of communication is the dichotomy between the virtuous and ordinary "people" and the corrupt, selfish "elite". The populist group positions itself as the sole voice and representative of the will of the people.
2.	Emotional and Simple Rhetoric (Sarifin, 2022; Jayakarta and Yusra, 2023; Auers and Kasekamp, 2013)	Populist discourse is characterized by the use of clear, easy-to-understand, and emotional language to provoke dissatisfaction, anger, or hope in society. The problems faced by society are usually conveyed in a simple and direct way, although the solutions provided are often unrealistic or lack detail.
3.	Rejection of the Status Quo and Institutions (Soare, 2024)	The common theme is to reject the established political system, traditional parties, mainstream media, and international organizations, which are considered part of a "broken system", serving only the interests of elite groups.
4.	Charismatic Leadership (Urbinati, 2009)	Populist movements are usually carried out by leaders with attractive personalities, so that they are able to relate directly to the people, without depending on political figures.
5.	Anti-Elitism and Conspiracy Narratives (Acemoglu et al., 2012)	Populist communications typically use stories about cooperation between elites, invisible goals, or behind-the-scenes forces that are at odds with the interests of ordinary people, thus reinforcing a "us against them" feeling.
6.	Anti-Pluralisme (Manshur, 2019)	A rejection of pluralism, or a belief in improper tolerance, in which society is perceived as one equal group with the same goals and desires, and the voices or interests of minority groups are ignored.
7.	Nationalism and Nativism (Tufis, 2021; Moffitt and	A strong emphasis on national identity, protection against threats from abroad, protectionist policies, and rejection of immigration.

Tormey, 2014; Yarrow and Palmer, 2017; Kahil, 2025; Kenes and Yilmaz, 2024)

Populism in Romania has developed through several phases since the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. During the time of Nicolae Ceaușescu, nationalistic populist rhetoric was used to maintain power. After the transition to democracy, populism resurfaced in the 1990s through the Greater Romanian Party (PRM) led by Corneliu Vadim Tudor with nationalist and anti-establishment rhetoric. In the 2000s, Traian Băsescu used anti-communist and pro-EU populism to win elections. The latest wave of populism was marked by the emergence of the AUR Party, a right-wing nationalist party that is skeptical of the EU but pro-US and pro-NATO. Under the leadership of George Simion, AUR garnered huge support and garnered 40.69% of the vote in the first round of the 2025 presidential election, with an intense social media campaign and a "Romania First" narrative. This populism grew as anti-establishment sentiment fragmented that initially supported pro-EU reforms (such as the USR) but later shifted towards rejection of the Western system. Other populist figures such as Diana Soaca and Călin Georgescu have taken advantage of mediatization and politainment to attract public sympathy with pro-Russian, anti-NATO, and anti-EU rhetoric. Growing dissatisfaction with corruption, economic inequality and access to public services has strengthened support for populist groups, although Romania's membership of the EU has brought economic growth but has not been even for the entire working class.

The AUR political party has the support of the segments of young voters, rural and small-town populations, as well as social conservative groups and religious voters, attached.

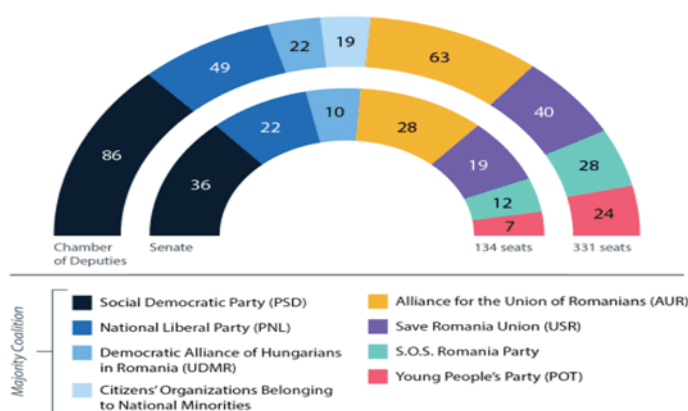
Table 1. Profile of AUR Party voter groups

No.	Voter group of the AUR Populist Party (AUR Party, 2025)	Information
1.	Young Voters	Especially men aged 18-35 years who are interested in the situation of the party's youth and patriotic spirit. Trends show that more than one-third of Romanian citizens, especially youth, are open to the idea that totalitarian systems can benefit the state (Podoshen, Verenca, and Ketkar, 2008).
2.	Rural and Small Town Populations (Agergaard et al., 2021)	<i>The county</i> is described as having poverty and high migration rates.
3.	Diaspora of Migrant Workers (Soare and Tufis, 2023)	The Romanian diaspora in Western Europe, especially young emigrants working in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, were disappointed with the centrist parties (PNL and PSD) that failed to carry out reforms. Note. The Romanian diaspora was a supporter and voter of the KWI President in two terms in 2014-2019 and 2019-2025.
4.	Social Conservatives and Religious Voters	Interested in traditional family values and religious themes; low-income society and formal education and anti-vaccine advocates (Colibasanu, 2025).

Source: Adapted from AUR Party official data and supporting literature (2025)

After the resignation of the President of the KWI on February 12, 2025, the domestic political situation of Romania was consolidated through the appointment of Ilie Bolojan as interim president until the election of Nicușor Dan in the election of May 18, 2025, and his inauguration on May 26, 2025. The new government faces serious challenges, including the

controversy over the annulment of the 2024 election that Călin Georgescu won and declared the result of "Russian intervention" through a disinformation campaign. Domestically, President Nicușor Dan must maintain post-pandemic economic stability, strengthen the anti-corruption agenda, maintain the independence of the judiciary, and manage the political polarization that continues to be fueled by the populist groups AUR and S.O.S.RO, while maintaining the support of a large coalition involving the PNL, PSD, USR, UDMR, and minority parties. In the foreign field, the new government is faced with the impact of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the potential for Russia-Moldova escalation, and the obligation to meet EU democratic and governance standards after officially joining Schengen on January 1, 2025. Public concerns have arisen over the consistency of the grand coalition—especially the PSD's dominance—in eradicating corruption and maintaining the independence of state institutions, while maintaining stable relations with the EU amid domestic populist political pressure.



Source: <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48440>

Table 2. Percentage of main coalition parties supporting President Nicușor Dan and parliamentary parties after the December 1, 2024 election

PSD Party	Social Democratic Party (Romanian: Partidul Social Democrat), Center-left	1989 (Formerly known as the National Salvation Front, formerly the Romanian communist party. 2001 Social Democratic Party.
PNL Party	National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal), Center-Rights	Formed in 1875 and 1990
USR Party	Save Romania Union (Uniunea Salvați România), Right-wing Populism	Formed in 2016
Party SOS RO	S.O.S. Romania (S.O.S. România), Partai Sayap Kanan	Formed in 2021
AUR Party	Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor), Partai Ultra Nasionalis	Formed in 2019
POT Party	Party of Young People (Partidul Oamenilor Tineri)	Formed in 2023
UDMR RMDSZ	Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România), (Hungarian: Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség). Partai Keturunan orang Hungaria di Rumania	Formed in 1989 (Party of people of Hungarian descent in Romania)

Source: Compiled from official election results and party profiles (2024–2025)

Eurobarometer data from May (Spring) 2025 states that 52 percent of EU citizens trust the EU's performance—the highest level since 2007—and that 52 percent trust the European Commission, the highest in 18 years. Meanwhile, 43 percent of EU citizens hold a positive image of the EU, 38 percent neutral, and 18 percent negative, while 62 percent are optimistic about the EU's future prospects. From a defense and security perspective, 78 percent of EU citizens prioritize these issues over the next five years, and 81 percent support the EU's security and defense policy—the highest percentage since 2004.

Regarding the Russia-Ukraine war, Eurobarometer data indicate that EU citizens, among other views, report the following: 80 percent are willing to accept war victims as refugees in the EU; 76 percent support providing financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine; 72 percent approve economic sanctions against the Russian government, companies, and individuals; 60 percent back granting Ukraine candidate status for EU membership; and 59 percent agree with the EU helping procure defense equipment for Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the Institute for Research and European Studies (IRES) in December 2024 stated that 88.1 percent of Romanian citizens opposed leaving the EU (*Ro-Exit*), while 66.8 percent believed Romania should join the EU. In line with IRES, the October 2024 GLOBSEC Poll indicated that more than 70 percent of Romanian citizens felt the EU dominates Romania's national decision-making.

Furthermore, in May 2025, IRES reported that 74 percent of Romanian citizens believe the EU benefits Romania, and 70 percent feel Romania benefits from the EU. Then, in September 2025, IRES stated that 38.1 percent of Romanian citizens believe the EU limits or reduces Romanian sovereignty. It also found that 84.6 percent of Romanians agree Romania should prioritize national interests even if it means losing EU benefits, and 65.7 percent believe EU members should retain sovereignty over their decisions.

In general, by 2025, most Romanian citizens support pro-EU and pro-Western policies. Nevertheless, Eurosceptic sentiment is growing, alongside right-wing populist and ultranationalist parties, due to economic concerns, demands for corruption eradication, and anti-establishment views. This anti-establishment sentiment is evident in the persistence of grand coalitions—comprising mainstream parties such as PNL and PSD, along with USR, UDMR, and minority parties—like those during President *KWT*'s era. In other words, the public remains concerned about the government's corruption eradication efforts, an issue exploited in the narratives of populist groups sidelined in the presidential election.

The emergence of the AUR Party on 19 September 2019, led by George Simion, marked an important socio-political phenomenon in Romania, especially ahead of the 2020 local and parliamentary elections, where the party garnered 1 percent of the vote in local elections and 9 percent in parliamentary elections, rising to 18 percent in the 2024 parliamentary elections. The AUR party promotes four main programs: family, nation, Orthodox Christianity, and freedom, while capitalizing on populist narratives critical of the government and the European Union. This research aims to uncover and analyze George Simion's political communication strategy for gaining public support, particularly in the context of Romania's EU membership, by integrating Heider's attribution theory and Dan Nimmo's theory of political communication. The study is expected to contribute theoretically to understanding populist communication dynamics in Eastern Europe, as well as offer

practical benefits for political actors, policymakers, and society in countering Eurosceptic narratives and fostering informed, critical public discourse amid Romania's growing political polarization.

METHOD

The research employed a descriptive design, with George Simion as the subject and the attribution of his political communication as the object. A qualitative method was used, relying on literature study. Data analysis involved critical discourse analysis, focusing on society, elite groups, the government, and the EU. Data were drawn from journals, the AUR Party website, George Simion's statements, statements by Romanian populist groups, and comments by other politicians on the AUR party. The analysis integrated Heider's attribution theory with Dan Nimmo's theory of political communication and van Dijk's critical discourse analysis in the context of Romania's EU membership.

Since its inception in 2019, the AUR Party, led by George Simion, entered Parliament in the 2020 parliamentary elections. Heider's attribution theory was applied through causal attributions (cause or reason). Simion actively promoted populism in the community. Dan Nimmo's theory of political communication was used to examine how the AUR party and George Simion employed symbols (Nimmo, 2011: p.79), political rhetoric (Nimmo, 2011: p.118), construction of political reality portraying EU membership as a threat to Romania (Nimmo, 2011: p.42), and conveyance of political messages (Nimmo, 2011: p.112) to gain Romanian public support.

The research hypothesis posited that, despite receiving the most votes (40.69%) in the first round of the presidential election on May 4, 2025—ahead of Nicușor Dan's 20.99%—Simion lost public support in the second round. Voters shifted away due to concerns that his extremist tendencies would trigger polarization, leading them to choose a moderate, non-ultranationalist candidate. In the second round on May 18, 2025, pro-EU independent candidate Nicușor Dan defeated Simion with 53.6% of the vote to Simion's 46.4%. This voter shift was explained through the attribution of political communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to gain support from the public, the Alliance Party for the Unity of the Romanian People (AUR) carried out populist communication, among others: using new media e.g. Facebook, conveying nationalistic and conservative messages, carrying out anti-establishment and anti-corruption political rhetoric, taking advantage of public dissatisfaction with the government, emphasizing campaigns on the Romanian diaspora and actively holding demonstrations in the field and holding meetings with rural communities and marginalized communities.

The political views of the AUR Party/Party Chairman George Simion towards the Romanian Government

Political Communication: anti-foreign



Picture from George Simion's wedding, available on his personal website for public access. <https://georgesimion.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/un-an-de-la-nunta-lui-George-Simion-12.jpeg>.

Figure 1. George Simion married Ilinca Munteanu August 22, 2022 in traditional Romanian dress (Marica, 2022)

The main themes of George Simion's campaign are ultranationalism (the unification of Moldova with Romania), anti-elitism, pro-Russian and anti-Western, social conservatism, anti-foreigners and anti-corruption, and the protection of Romanian minorities and diaspora. The photo above is a wedding photo of George Simion wearing traditional Romanian clothes. The basic traditional Romanian costume has remained the same for centuries. The main element of the traditional clothing of men and women is the "white camisol" made of linen or cotton. The women use a belt or apron to tie around the waist. The cut and decoration of outerwear varies in each region. The photo was uploaded on Simion's official social media account in May 2023. The use of traditional clothing narrates George Simion's political stance of social conservatism, preserving traditional Romanian values.

The meaning of the photo is that Simion shows the public that the Romanian Government has changed the Romanian people who do not love Romanian culture. For this reason, Simion invites the public to preserve Romanian traditions that are being eroded by foreign cultures. Simion gave rise to and constructed a symbol of Romanian tradition. The construction of opinion on the displacement of Romanian culture by foreign cultures emerged after Romania joined the EU. Simion positioned the government in an elite group that changed and influenced Romanian culture. Simion's actions are a form of external attribution, namely because of Romania's influence as a member of the European Union, Simion conveys a nationalistic message.

Simion uploaded the photo in 2023 to coincide with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic where the Romanian Government is trying to recover the Romanian economy. A solid year in 2023, it is a continuation of the coalition of the PNL and PSD Parties formed in November

2022. Furthermore, the great coalition continued until the time of the Nicorsur Dan Government. Simion denounced the grand coalition. Simion described his group as "*anti-system*" because the grand coalition had previously disappointed the public. Simion stated that the large coalition was a kurup group (Fella, 2025).

1) **Political Communication: Ultrationalism and Sovereignty**

George Simion has controversial views and political style following the *Make America Great Again* (MAGA) movement in the United States. Simion uses a narrative of nationalism and anti-elitism, criticizing the political and economic system of the Romanian Government by positioning himself as a representative of the common people (France 24, 2025).



Figure 2. George Simion, the hard-right front-runner of Romania's presidential election, is a steadfast fan of Donald Trump and his MAGA movement. © Daniel Mihailescu, AFP

The meaning of the photo above illustrates the theme of George Simion's campaign is ultrationalism and sovereignty following the model of the Donald Trump (*Make America Great Again*) campaign. The MAGA movement, or *Make America Great Again*, was sparked by the belief that the U.S. was once a "big" country. However, the US is considered to have lost its status as a superpower country. This is due to foreign influence both within the US (through immigration and multiculturalism) and abroad (through globalization, or the integration of various US economies with other countries). MAGA adherents stated that to bring back MAGA it was necessary to have an "*America First*" policy. The policy is to implement economic protectionism, reduce immigration from developing countries, and enforce MAGA as traditional U.S. values. Actually, the beginning of the emergence of MAGA was in the administration of President Ronald Reagan during the 1980 presidential election campaign (Sheposh, 2023). Simion using Trump's MAGA was implemented in Romania (McGrath, 2025).

Simion saw that after Romania joined the EU the Romanian Government's policies were influenced by the EU. Romania is not independent in taking domestic or foreign policies. The AUR party led by Simion wants to restore Romanian sovereignty through the MAGA or *Make Romania Great Again* campaign. The issue that Simion campaigned on was nationalism and centralizing Romanian sovereignty from foreign influence. Simion's action of bringing the "MAGA" topo is a form of external attribution, namely because of Romania's influence as a member of the European Union, Simion conveys a nationalistic message. Simion also applies

the attribution of political communication that by following the model or case of Donald Trump, Simion will win the presidential election.

Simion's photo was used during the presidential election campaign by linking Trump's idea to gain the support of the Romanian people. Simion narrated that currently Romania is under foreign dominance, namely the EU and NATO. The Aur Party, which represents small communities, protests against the dominance of foreign-influenced governments (economically by the EU and defensively and security by NATO).

Political Communication: Ultrationalist

Armean researchers state George Simion has been a Member of Parliament since 2020 and a Member of the European Parliament since 2019. Simion has always been in the public spotlight for his controversial stance, which was considered to be a fascist, actively protesting in public with violence. Becoming known during the COVID-19 crisis, Simion opposed wearing masks and getting vaccinated. Simion also criticized the government for failing to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic. Simion campaigned for Greater Romania, namely to recombine the Bessarabia region which is now the state of Moldova and the Bukovina region which is now included in the territory of Ukraine. Both regions were included in Greater Romania (Armeanu, 2025).

Simion assesses that the Government of President Klaus Werner Iohannis has failed to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic and construct a reality that the Romanian Government in cooperation with the globalist group (EU) can solve the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on society. In addition, Simion also constructed that it was necessary to grow a greater Romania that included the territory of Moldova and the region of Bessarabia part of Ukraine. Simion's political views were used as rhetoric to attract the sympathy of the Romanian people. Simion represents himself or the AUR Party as part of Romanian society and the Government of Romania and the European Union as an Elite group. Simion, who considers the EU as a globalist group, is the application of political communication attribution (external attribution).

The context of Simion's statement quoted by Armeanus illustrates that the COVID-19 pandemic has an impact on the economy of the Romanian people. Simion's rhetoric was conveyed during the 2019 European Parliament election campaign and the Romanian Parliament general election in 2020. Repeated political messages are conveyed through social media, mainly *Facebook*, Instagram and TikTok aiming to gain cognitive, affective and conative support from the Romanian people.

2) Political Communication: Social conservatism and anti-EU and anti-NATO

The US MAGA policy was implemented by George Simion in Romania's presidential campaign in May 2025. Simion's political views are social-conservatism and anti-EU and anti-NATO. Simion said his party supports the MAGA movement in the style of US President Donald Trump. It is said that there was public anger when Romania joined the EU and NATO. Simion told DW Media that it wants Romania to have a 'strategic partnership with the US', but the EU should not interfere in Romania's domestic policies, including cultural and sexual aspects" (Majumdar and Ford, 2025). In other words, Simion wants the EU not to interfere in Romania's domestic political policies. The words *cultural and sexual aspects* can be interpreted as saying that the EU supports LGBT and on the other hand the AUR Party rejects LGBT.

Simion knows that the US relations with the EU are less harmonious because the US has reduced its aid to Ukraine and has reduced the US troops in NATO, which are stationed in

Romania from 1700 personnel to 1000 personnel (Roth, 2025). By supporting Trump's MAGA policies, Simion will have the support of the US. At home in Romania, Simion campaigned for Romanian sovereignty. However, there are currently NATO soldiers in Romania.

Simion's statement was delivered in the context of the Romanian Government's attitude in the face of the Russia-Ukraine war. Simion is of the view that Romanian territory is occupied and controlled by the EU and NATO, while NATO places its troops in Romania, as many as 3,000 NATO troops (Reuter, October 2025). For this reason, Simion campaigned to the public that sovereignty is a priority for Romania.

3) Simion Political Communication: Nationalism, Anti-Elite and Anti-EU

Text Dimension: In a French media report after the victory of the first round of the presidential election, Simion stated that: "I am here to restore constitutional order". "I have one goal: to return to the Romanian people what has been taken from them (the elite groups in Romania and the EU)." Simion accused EU officials of interfering in Romania's elections and had promised to restore his country's "dignity" within the bloc. Despite his frequent criticism of Russia, Simion opposes sending military aid to Ukraine and wants Romania to reduce support for Ukrainian refugees (France 24, 2025).

Simion made Romanian people aware that EU officials had interfered in resolving Romania's domestic and foreign problems. People's sovereignty has been taken away by Romania's political elite in cooperation with the EU. Simion did not strongly condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine because Simion is positioned close to Russia. In addition, it is said that Romanian assistance for Ukrainian refugees is better given to the Romanian people. This action is a form of closeness to the Romanian people. Simion sees that the EU has always intervened politically to the Romanian Government, which is pro-EU. Simion's actions are an attribution of political communication that the EU tends to control Romania (external attribution). The purpose of the attribution is to obtain cognitive, affective and conative support from Romanian society.

Simion's statement was delivered in the context of the 2024 and 2025 presidential elections. Simion alleged that the EU had influenced Romanian policies, including the cancellation of the presidential election in the first round on November 24, 2024. It said that it had conveyed to the Government that the political-elite and the EU had influenced Romanian policy.

Romanians voted for Nicorsur and not George Simion

After the victory of the presidential election in the first round, the public was worried about Simion's extreme political stance and triggered polarization in the community. For this reason, in the second round, the Romanian people voted for Nicorsur Dan who is pro-EU.

1) Communication: Causal Attribution from Society

Drobot researcher stated that many Romanians through social media expressed their support for pro-EU candidates and that there was support for anti-EU populist groups. Public support for pro-EU groups is growing due to Romania's historical experience, economic aspects, migration patterns, and geopolitical concerns. The community considers factors such as the historical context, namely the reaction to the communist era. Romania's experience under the Soviet Union and communism made people distrust Russia and authoritarianism. The European Union is considered to represent a country that upholds democracy, the rule of law,

and modernization. This situation is different from the oppression in the communist era. From this perspective, the European Union represents freedom as a citizen. (Drobot, 2025),

Drobot assessed that in the presidential election, pro-Russian candidate George Simion was categorized as an undemocratic group and did not apply the rule of law. On the other hand, pro-EU presidential candidate Nicorsur Dan is seen by Romanians as a democratic group and supports the implementation of human rights. People tend to think that they no longer want to experience like in the era of communism. For this reason, the Romanian people prefer Nicorsur Dan.

The attitude of the Romanian people to the statement of the researcher Drobot is the view of the Romanian people during the campaign and the second round of the presidential election between two ultranationalist presidential candidates George Simion and the pro-EU presidential candidate Nicorsur Dan. People who see Simion as extreme right and trigger polarization make people worried about choosing Simion. In the opinion of the Romanian people, voting for Simion will return to the way it was in the era of communism. For this reason, the people voted for Nicorsur Dan in the second round of the presidential election in Romania.

2) Communication: People View Romania's Membership in the EU Positively

For this reason, many Romanian citizens view the EU as a major factor for economic stability and improved quality of life for Romanians. In addition, pro-EU candidates could attract investment and strengthen access to markets and funds from the EU. Furthermore, regarding migration and the Romanian diaspora, as many as 3 million Romanian citizens work in EU member states. In addition, EU member states also have first-hand experience of good governance. The experience of governance can be applied by the pro-EU government, namely presidential candidate Nicorsur Dan. Ease of access in the EU that can increase the income of the Romanian diaspora through JGA remittances makes the community factor support pro-EU presidential candidates (Drobot, 2025)

Romanians view that the EU makes the Romanian economy stable. Romanians also believe that populist groups tend to make Romania threatened both economically and politically. The public's understanding is reflected in the changes in society during the second round of the presidential election won by the pro-EU presidential candidate Nicorsur Dan.

Drobot's statement was delivered during the Romanian presidential election in the second round of 2025.

3) Communication: The Ease of People Going Abroad

Users of social media such as *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and X (formerly Twitter), are highly educated youth and urban communities. These groups tend to travel or study abroad; respect the norms of liberal democracy; and view the EU as part of their identity and future. In addition, the group is also influenced by Western media narratives that do not trust nationalist or anti-EU rhetoric. (Drobot, 2025).

Drobot is of the view that youth and urban society are pro-EU groups that respect EU values, namely human rights, democratization, liberalism and *good governance*. Meanwhile, anti-EU groups are ultranationalist or populist groups.

The context of the above statement occurs when there is an anti-western campaign carried out by populist groups and a pro-western campaign supported by youth and urban society.

4) **Communication: A Sense of Security from the Community when Joining the EU and NATO**

Drobot's view of being part of the EU is associated with a pro-NATO stance, which is associated with Romania's national security guarantees. Global security and legitimacy are associated with the alignment of the EU by many Romanians. The EU is considered a catalyst to eradicate corruption in Romania. The EU's cooperation and verification mechanism is seen by Romanians as a tool of pressure that can hold political figures or the Government accountable for carrying out clean governance. In addition, pro-EU presidential candidates often promise transparency and reforms, which are relevant to Romanian society. (Drobot, 2025).

Romanians see that joining the EU is an increase in the sense of security in Romania. On the other hand, if it hesitates to cooperate with the EU or leave the EU, as populist groups are campaigning, Romania's political and security situation will be unstable.

The above events are the context of the Romanian presidential election between a pro-EU presidential candidate and a skeptical and anti-EU populist group.

5) **Communication: Good Governance and the Rule of Law**

Nicuşor Dan positions himself as the guardian of the Euro-Atlantic alliance of which Romania is a part. In his May 10, 2025 campaign, Nicuşor Dan emphasized that the European Union supports Romania's economic growth. It said it affirmed its pro-Western political views, not isolationists. In addition, Nicuşor Dan emphasized that his party supports the eradication of corruption, judicial reform, and transparency. It is said that presidential candidate George Simion is a supporter of Russia, which would be an opponent of democratic progress. Nicuşor Dan stated that Romania's foreign policy is flexible, continuing the policy of security cooperation in favor of Ukraine. For this reason, Romania maintains a stronger defense alliance with Pro-EU groups because it is for the stability of the Romanian Government. (Drobot, 2025)

Drobot observers describe that there is a competition between pro-EU candidates who support economic growth and good governance and anti-establishment populist groups. Social Context Dimension: The context of the event is a reflection of the struggle between pro-EU groups and populist groups.

CONCLUSION

Nicuşor Dan's victory in the second round of Romania's presidential election highlighted a shift in voter preferences, as many previously swayed by the AUR party's intensive social media campaigns—rooted in anti-elite, anti-establishment, and government-critical narratives since 2019—switched support due to fears of authoritarianism reminiscent of the Ceauşescu era. This included the diaspora and pro-EU/pro-NATO groups backing Dan's reformist, anti-corruption platform. While populist digital strategies proved effective in building support, they were ultimately overcome by Dan's moderate, inclusive agenda and balanced social media use. For future research, scholars could examine how counter-narratives on emerging platforms like TikTok or AI-driven content influence populist resilience in Eastern European elections.

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