



Social networks as a tool for populism: Evidence from Romania

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Abstract

The paper aims to evaluate the potential of social networks in shaping the electoral behavior by analyzing their role in the last legislative elections held in Romania in December 2020, during Covid-19 pandemic. It focuses on the impact of Facebook as the main social network in Romania during the electoral campaign. Restrictions imposed by the pandemic determined a shift of communication towards the virtual space, where a new populist party, The Alliance for the Union of Romanians (AUR), had an active campaign, focused on messages against the ruling parties and the control of the pandemic. Monitoring the Facebook account of AUR leader George Simion during the election campaign, the paper provides information on the number of posts and main topics/narratives, in order to find the answer to the main research questions: which is the relationship between the online popularity of candidates/parties and the election results and whether the digital channels are a tool for maximizing the votes of populist parties.

Keywords: populism, elections, social networks, Facebook, Covid-19 pandemic