



Populism in Eastern Europe.

***New types of libertarian populism vs
authoritarian populism:***

The Romanian case

Authors: **Dan Sultanescu PhD, Dana Sultanescu PhDc**

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Disclaimer

The views included in this presentation are those of the authors. They do not represent the official position of Romanian National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA).



Authors

Dr. Dan Sultanescu
Drd. Dana Sultanescu

Objective



- Evaluating the populist phenomenon in a country like Romania is a complex research objective and requires an important distinction between **two dimensions**:
 - + effectively measuring the **public's** populist predispositions, regardless of party affinities,
 - + and evaluating the ideological discourse of the main **parties** as well as the relationship between these ideological approaches and the populist attitudes in society.
- In our research, we evaluated the current state of the populist inclinations of the voting-age population in Romania, and also the ideological mechanisms and contexts that have recently stimulated these populist attitudes.
- We can observe a rise in populist attitudes in Romania in recent years, especially in the context of the emergence of a new political force with populist and ultra-nationalistic discourse. We operate on the premise that parties can have populist approaches independently from the ideology they support, and also that understanding the relation between (political) discourse and populist orientation (of the public) is relevant.

Theoretical model

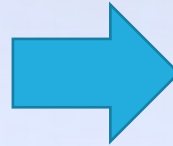
- Various academic studies of populism (Mudde, 2004; Mudde, 2010; Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2014, Schultz et al., 2017, Norris & Inglehart, 2019) identify two important ideas to define populism:
 - + (1) **VOX POPULI**. "The people" is the main source of legitimacy, and the politicians must be accepted as serving the people. So, the voice of the public must always be taken into consideration for decisions
 - + and (2) **THE CORRUPTION OF THE SYSTEM**. The regular people and the elite represented by the politicians are two very different groups, with the public being much more fit to rule and govern than the corrupted elite.



Types of populism

Norris & Inglehart: “Populism is treated not as a distinct type of leadership, or even a family of political parties, as is often assumed,

but rather as a discourse about government that can be adopted by actors across the entire ideological spectrum” (Cultural Backlash, 2019)



Thus, we can assume that populist attitudes can be found for all political parties and all voters, in different degrees.

And we can evaluate differences between different types of populism:

- Libertarian populism (for progressive parties)
- Authoritarian populism (for right-wing parties)



Context – populism in Romania



- In the last 30 years, parties with populist messages were constantly elected to Parliament in Romania
- Romania has a tradition of 200 years of populist messages from political parties
- Today: Romania is a relatively new democracy, with less civic participation and a high attachment for traditional values, as well as a society strongly affected by internal and external struggles (the effects of anti-Western propaganda, the crisis in the European Union etc).
- The Romanian context is similar to other Eastern European new democracies

Measuring the populist axis through survey research.

The Pew Research method

<https://www.chesdata.eu/2019-chapel-hill-expert-survey>

- Respondents are classified as holding populist attitudes if they are **agreeing** with the following statements (the answers indicating populist attitudes are underlined):
 - + “Most elected officials care/don’t care what people like me think”
 - AND
 - + “Ordinary people would do a better job/do no better solving the country’s problems than elected officials”
- These measures are used by scholars studying populism to capture attitudes about an antagonistic relationship between elites and the people. The latest model – Pew Research, presented at AAPOR conference in Toronto, 2019
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2018/05/14/media-western-europe-how-this-study-measures-populism/>

2018. Pew Research results - Western Europe.

Populist views, by country

% of adults in each country who hold...

	Non-populist views	Mixed views	Populist views	Dif (Pop-Non)
Spain	12	43	45	33
Italy	12	45	43	31
France	16	44	40	24
UK	21	43	36	15
Germany	24	50	26	2
Netherlands	32	43	26	-6
Denmark	33	42	25	-8
Sweden	44	45	12	-32

Note: Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials."

Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

"In Western Europe, Public Attitudes Toward News Media More Divided by Populist Views Than Left-Right Ideology"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



Applying the Pew Research scale in Romania.

9 surveys (before and after the pandemic)



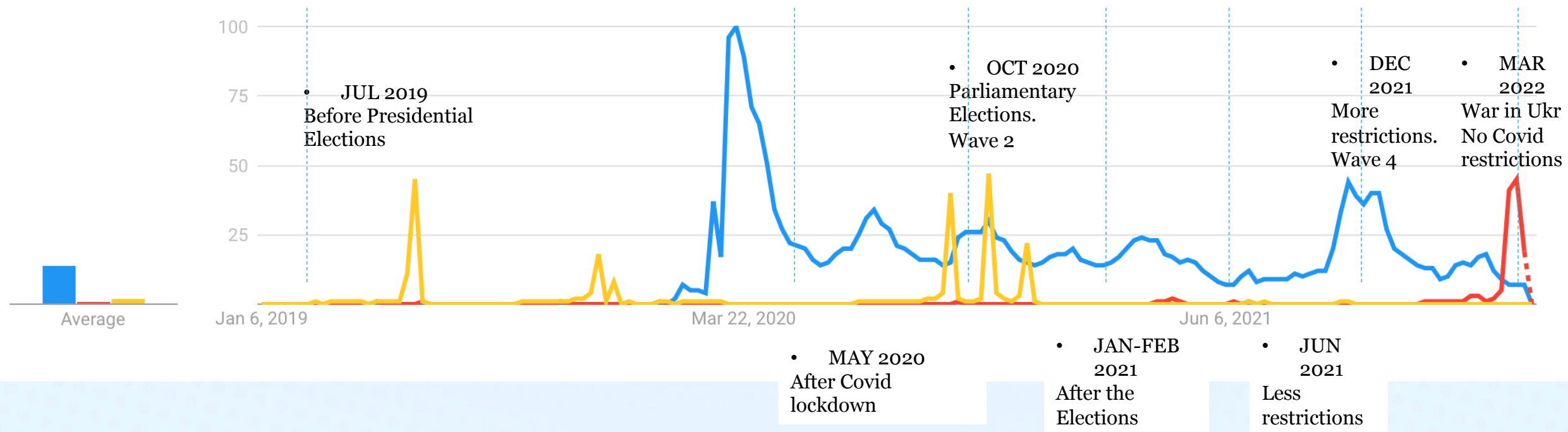
- Method:
 - + Two statements, with a **4 scale answer** (totally agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, totally disagree)
 - + “Most elected officials don’t care what people like me think”
 - + “Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials”
 - + We defined as **populist** those who agree with both statements at the same time (totally agree, somewhat agree), and as **non-populist** - those who do not agree with both statements at the same time; **the rest** are considered to hold mixed views
- Data:
 - + July 2019, 997 respondents, CATI
 - + May 2020, 900 respondents, CATI
 - + October 2020, 600 respondents, CATI
 - + January 2021, 984 respondents, CATI
 - + February 2021, 1550 respondents, CATI
 - + June 2021, 994 respondents, CATI
 - + December 2021, 1614 respondents, CATI
 - + January 2022, 1021 respondents CATI
 - + April 2022, 1400 respondents, CATI

Context of measurement in Romania



● Coronavirus disease 2019 ● Ukraine ● Election

Romania, 1/1/19 - 3/15/22



Romania. Applying the classic method of measuring populism. Comparison!



	Non-populist views	Mixed views	Populist views	Dif (Pop-Non)
Spain	12	43	45	33
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Romania 2019	11	32	57	46

- By applying the Pew Research methodology we obtained high levels of populism: 57% populists, 11% non-populists, și 32% mixed-views.
- Compared to Western democracies, the percentage of populists is much higher – in Spain it is 45%, in Italy – 43%, in France – 40%.
- The level of non-populist views is comparable to Latin countries (11% in Romania, compared to 12% in Spain or Italy).

Mesuring Romanian populism.

Introducing a new variable

- Since populist attitudes reach higher levels, we considered we needed a stronger variable to discern between levels of populist attitudes.
- We have added a third statement when measuring populism: the assumption that *all politicians are corrupt and should be punished*.
- Thus, our method uses 3 statements to evaluate populist attitudes:
 - + “Most elected officials don’t care what people like me think”
 - + “Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials”
 - + “Most politicians have stolen and should go to jail.”
- Based on answers to the three statements, we created 4 categories of respondents:
 - + **Strong populism** – those who respond “totally agree” for all 3 statements
 - + **Moderate populism** – those who express different levels of agreement (total & somewhat) with all three statements
 - + **Populist inclination** – those who express different levels of agreement (total & somewhat) with at least 2 of the 3 statements. This is a mixed public
 - + **The rest** – those with support for just one of the statements, or for none. This is mostly a non-populist public. This category also includes the undecided



Compatibility between the two scales

	Populist views	Mixed views	Non-populist views
Strong populism	39%	0%	0%
Moderate populism	49%	0%	0%
Populist inclination & mixed	11%	83%	0%
The rest	0%	17%	100%



The new scale simply creates degrees of populist attitudes. It does not change the proportion of populist vs non-populist groups.



Main characteristics of the public with constant populist attitudes



- Lower education
- Blue-collar workers, manual labour workers
- Self-identifying as having low or insufficient income
- People who consider the country is headed in the wrong direction
- People from rural areas
- People who consider that Romanians are defined by the Orthodox religion and tradition rather than the European identity and belonging to the EU family
- Non-voting public, who rejects mainstream political parties
- People who consider the fight against corruption as a major priority
- People who don't get their news from multiple sources

There are two specifically vulnerable categories of public –

(1) unemployed youth with no higher education, representing around 18-19% of the adult population, more susceptible to anti-Western and anti-democratic propaganda, who don't use regular news sources for information, but are active on social media;

(2) adult population with jobs and no higher education, representing around 27% of the adult population, active on social media). Regular media do not reach these groups.

Evolution in Romania - 2019-2022



- Electoral moments (July 2019, October 2020, January 2021) lead to a considerable increase of the level of populist attitudes.
- They decrease in quieter periods, such as post-election moments (see May 2020, June 2021).

	Jul-19	May-20	Oct-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Jul-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Apr-22
Non-populist views	10	9	8	8	7	8	5	7	8
Mixed views	31	30	27	30	33	32	36	32	35
Populist views	58	60	66	63	59	60	58	61	57
Dif (Pop-Non)	48	51	58	55	52	52	53	54	49

Before
elections

During
elections

Pandemic
wave

After
War

Differences: before & after the pandemic

Differences: before & after the war in Ukraine

Results for the new variable: 2019-2022

Date	Jul-19	May-20	Oct-20	Jan-21	Jul-21	Dec-21	Apr-22
Strong populism	28%	21%	34%	30%	29%	27%	22%
Moderate populism	22%	29%	27%	26%	30%	29%	28%
Populist inclination & mixed	30%	33%	27%	29%	28%	33%	36%
The rest	20%	18%	12%	15%	13%	11%	14%
Differences	30%	32%	50%	41%	46%	46%	36%

Evolution in time.
Strong populism –
higher levels
during the
pandemic, lower
levels – before the
pandemic and
currently (spring
2022)

Before
elections

During
elections

Pandemic
wave

After
The
start
of the
Ukrain
e war

What influences populism in Romania?



Looking at the voting preferences of the populist public for various moments in time, we reach a very interesting conclusion:

- **Before the pandemic**, the populist public voted for mainstream **opposition** parties. This conclusion is corroborated with the fact that **all** opposition parties, in preelectoral periods, used populist rhetoric to condemn policies and initiatives of the parties in power. Whenever a party left the opposition and entered government, its voters' attitudes became less populist.
- **After the pandemic**, the populist public started to prefer a newly-appeared **extremist and populist party**, with an aggressive anti-European, ultra-nationalist message. Thus, the public with populist views became attracted to a more dangerous political message, that had populism at its core, and did not merely use it as a rhetorical tool.

Other external factors that influence populist attitudes

- Voting for opposition / participation -> increase in populist attitudes
- Covid restrictions -> increase in populist attitudes
- Conspiracy beliefs -> increase in populist attitudes

Populist attitudes influences other factors, as well

- Populist attitudes -> antisemitic attitudes
- Populist attitudes -> Anti Western values
- Populist attitudes -> RoExit conversations

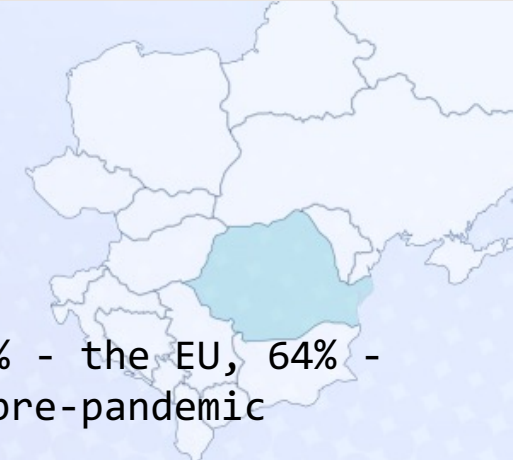


Trust in the West – new tendencies

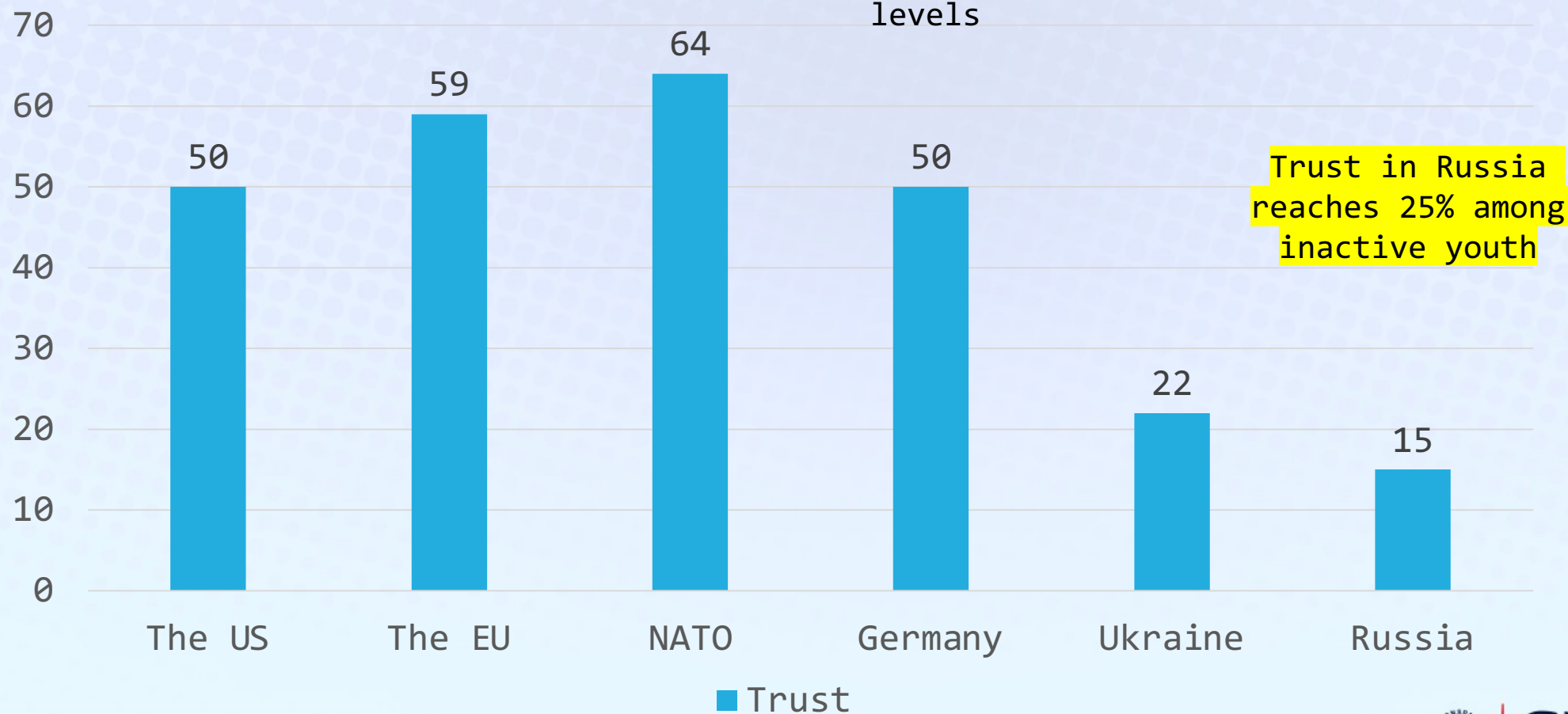
Data: CPD SNSPA. Comparisons 2012 - 2022

Trust in geopolitical actors. February 2022

Before War in Ukraine



Half of Romanians trust the US, 59% - the EU, 64% - trust NATO. Levles of trust reach pre-pandemic levels



Trust in Russia reaches 25% among inactive youth



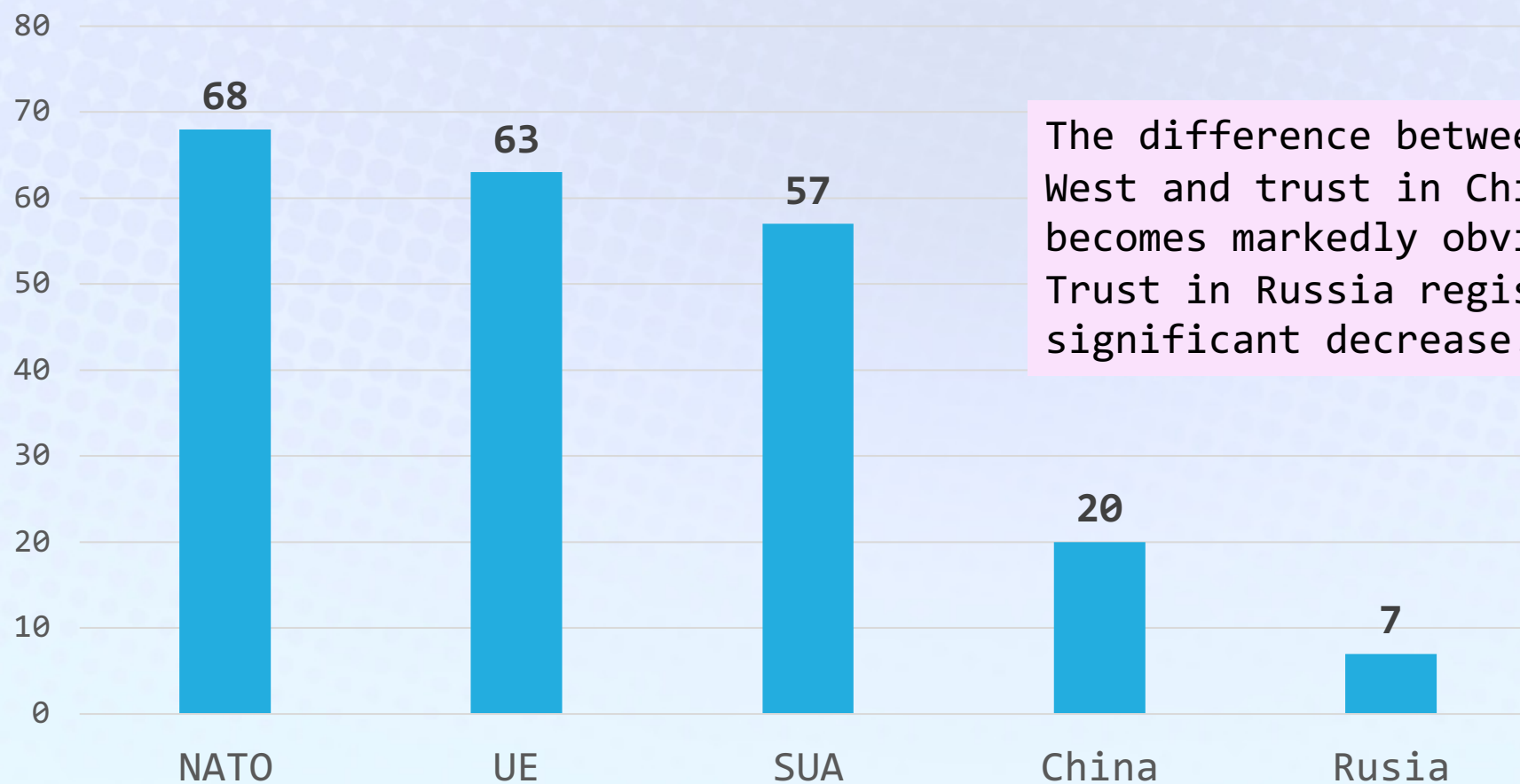
CPD

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Geopolitical trust – before the war in Ukraine

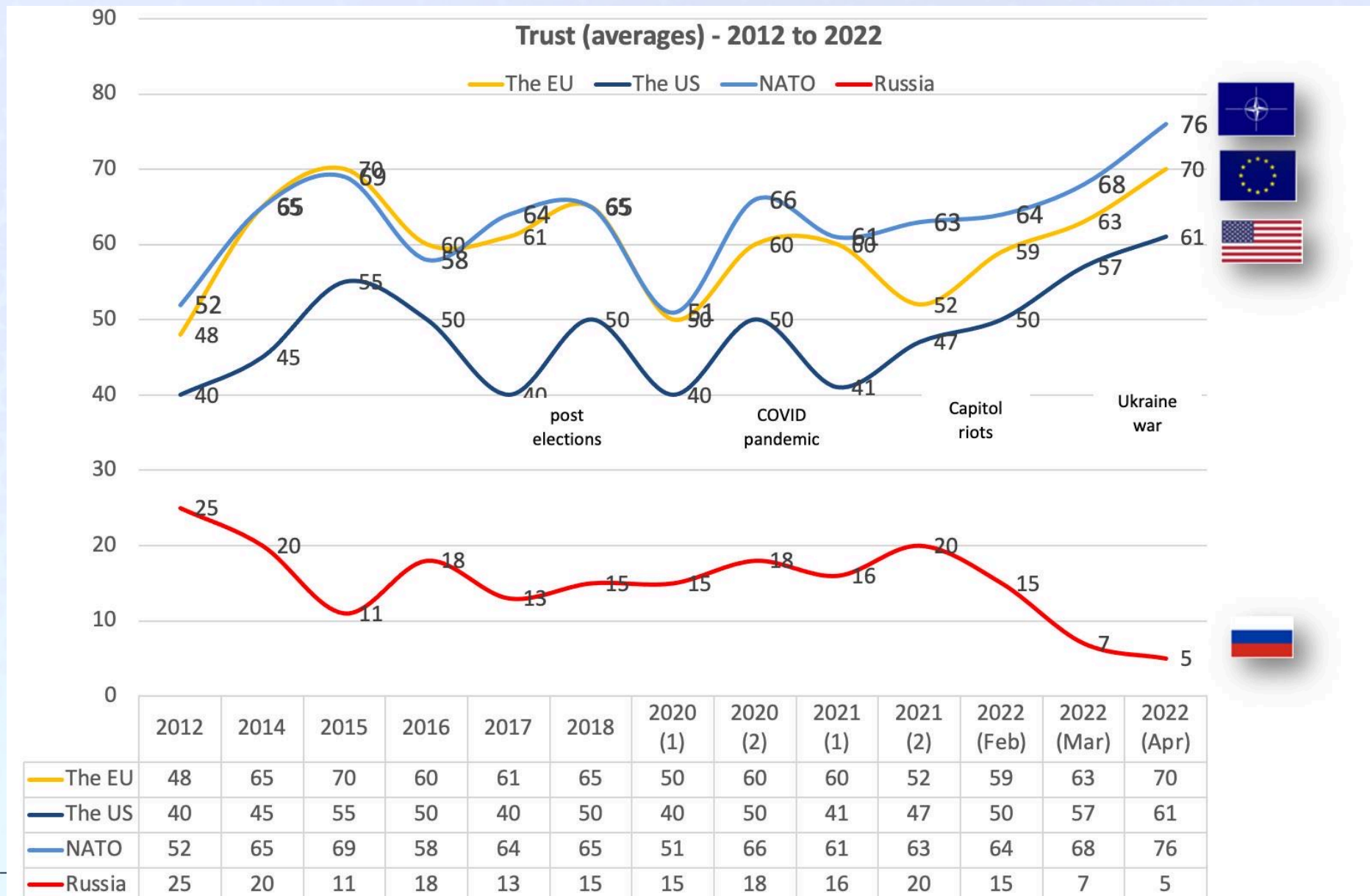


Trust in countries/institutions, after the start of the Ukraine war



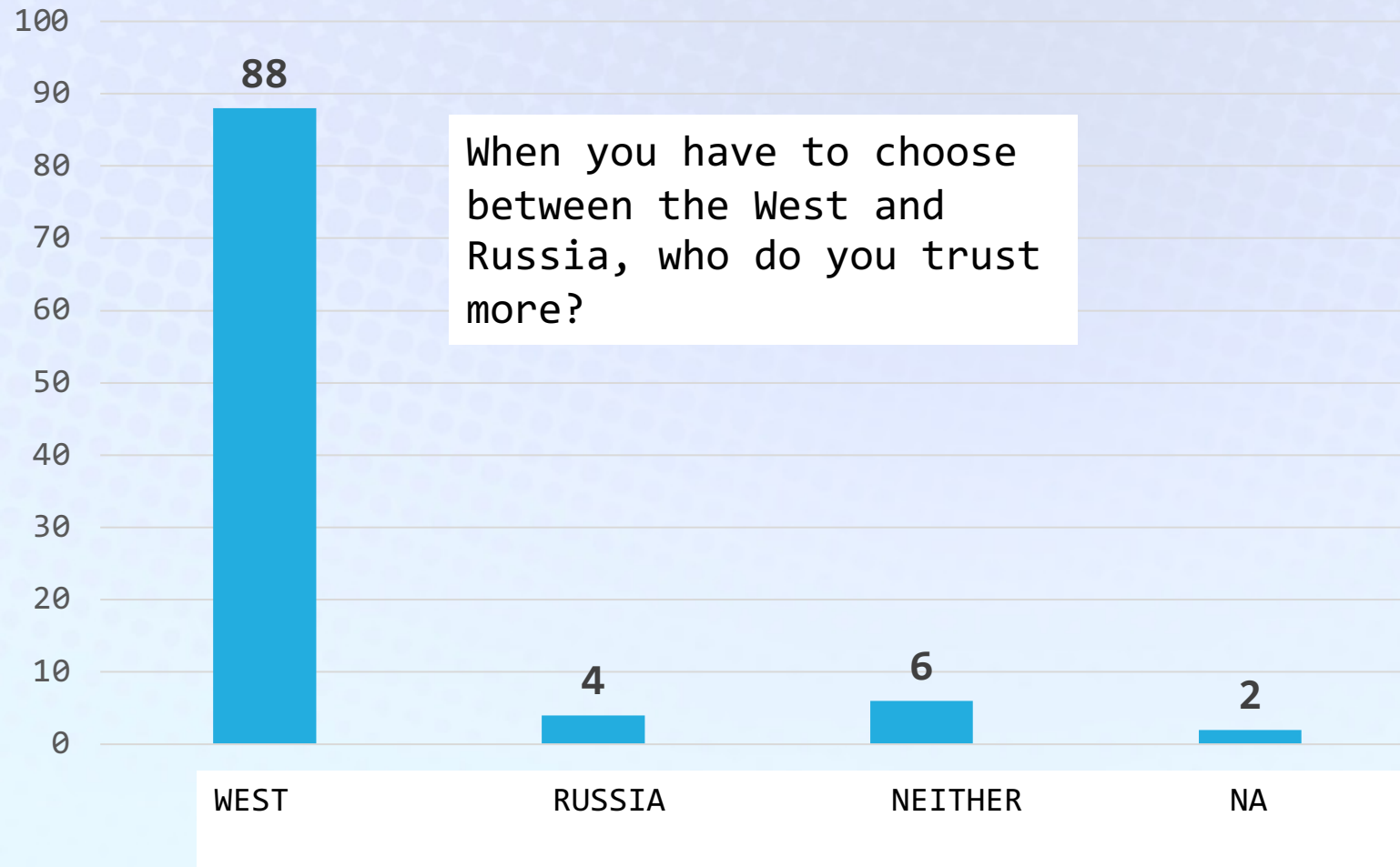
The difference between trust in the West and trust in China/Russia becomes markedly obvious. Trust in Russia registered a significant decrease.

Geopolitical trust – tendencies, 2012 - 2022



The war effect in #Romania - more people trust the US, the EU and NATO, and less people trust Russia.

Trust – West vs Russia



Context.

Increased visibility

for the populist

message in Romania

There are two specifically vulnerable categories of public –

- (1) unemployed youth with no higher education, representing around 18-19% of the adult population, more susceptible to anti-Western and anti-democratic propaganda, who don't use regular news sources for information, but are active on social media;
- (2) adult population with jobs and no higher education, representing around 27% of the adult population, active on social media also susceptible to populist messages). Regular media do not reach these groups.

Populist conversations in RO



G | M | F The German Marshall Fund
of the United States
STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

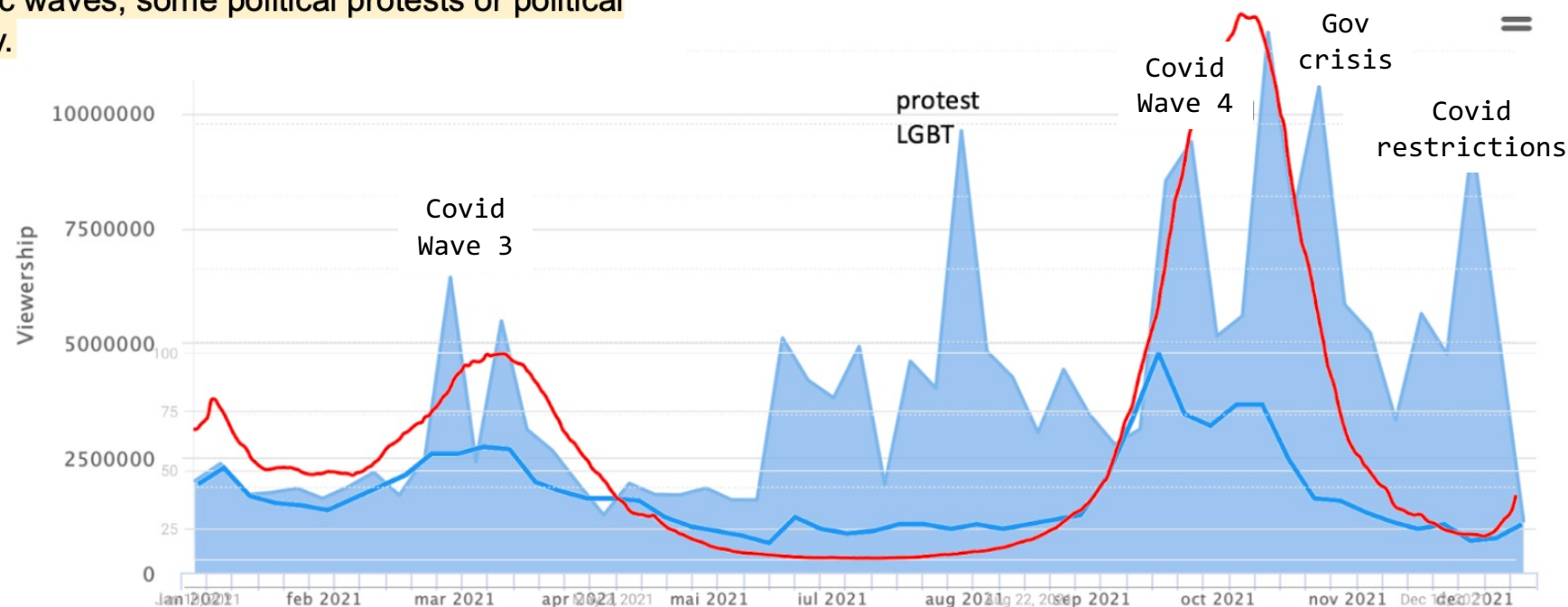


„Online mapping of nationalist narratives, with disruptive and polarizing potential in social media” - 2021

More about this:

<http://civicparticipation.ro/uncategorized/online-mapping-of-nationalist-narratives-with-disruptive-and-polarizing-potential-in-social-media/>

The peaks - in the same time with the Covid19 pandemic waves, some political protests or political instability.



Legenda

Linie **bleu** – interes de cautare pe Google, despre Covid19

Linie **rosie** – evolutia infectarilor (medie saptamanala)

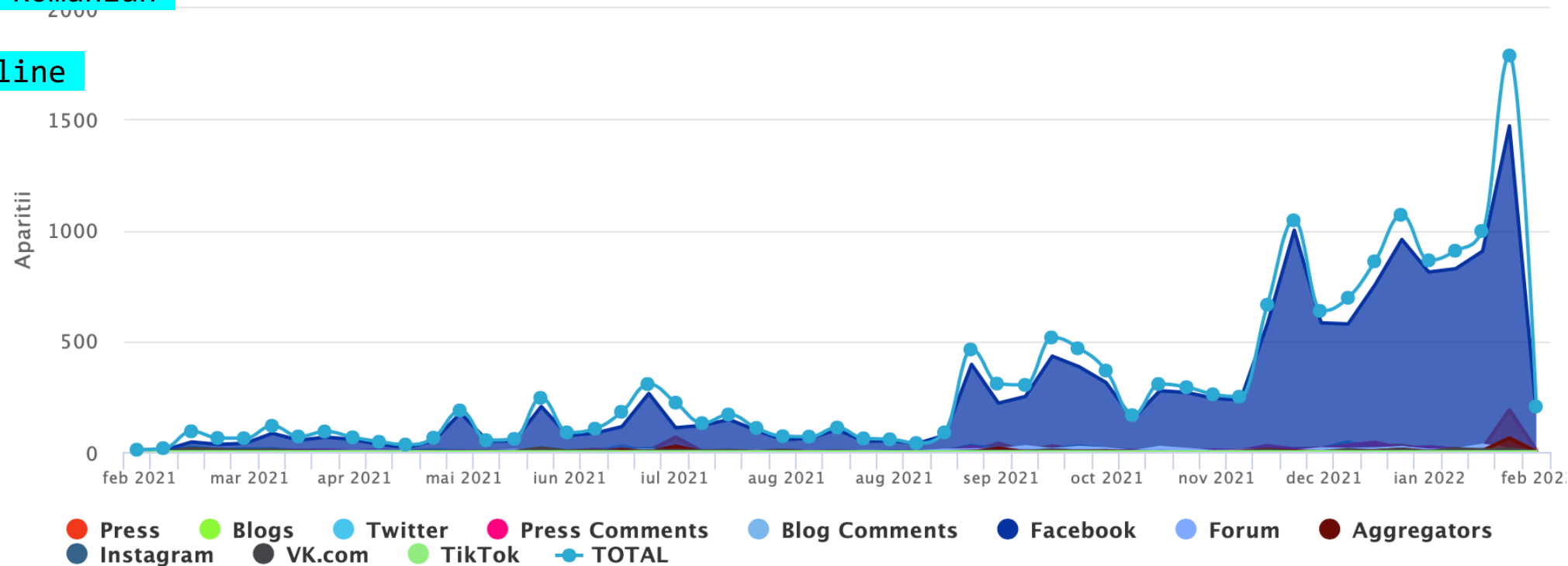
RO-EXIT

Starting last fall, conversation about Romanian Exit from the EU in the Romanian online environment

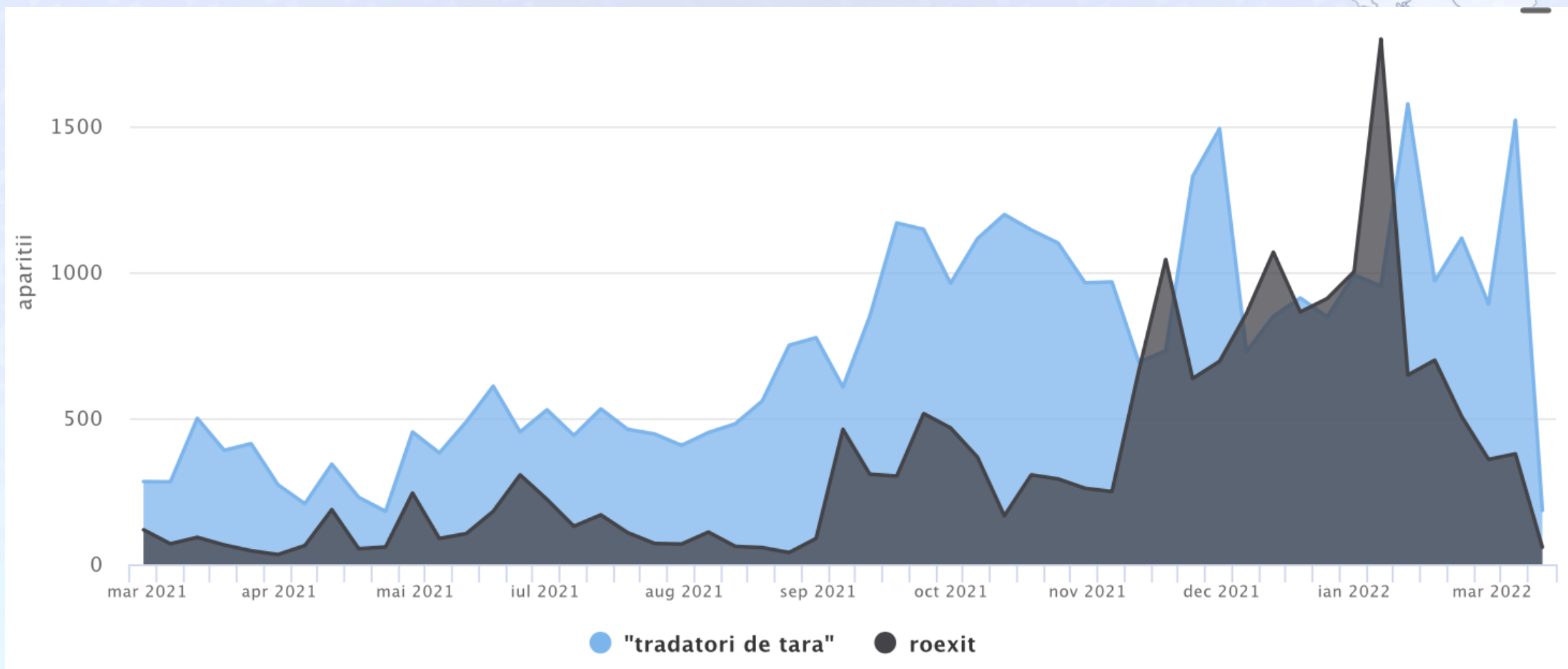
Tagcloud

afara ajunge AUR cred Diana Dragnea Europa european Europeana europene familia gen iesim **iesirea** importanta inteles interesele nationale nationalist NATO Parlamentul partid politica promoveaza propune PSD REFERENDUM religioase reprezinta RO-EXIT RoExit Romani Romania Romaniei romanii Rusia sansa singura solutie Sosoaca sustine SUVERANITATE tara traditionala UE Uniunea URGENT valorile vota Vrem

roexit OR ro-exit OR "ieșirea României din UE... last year

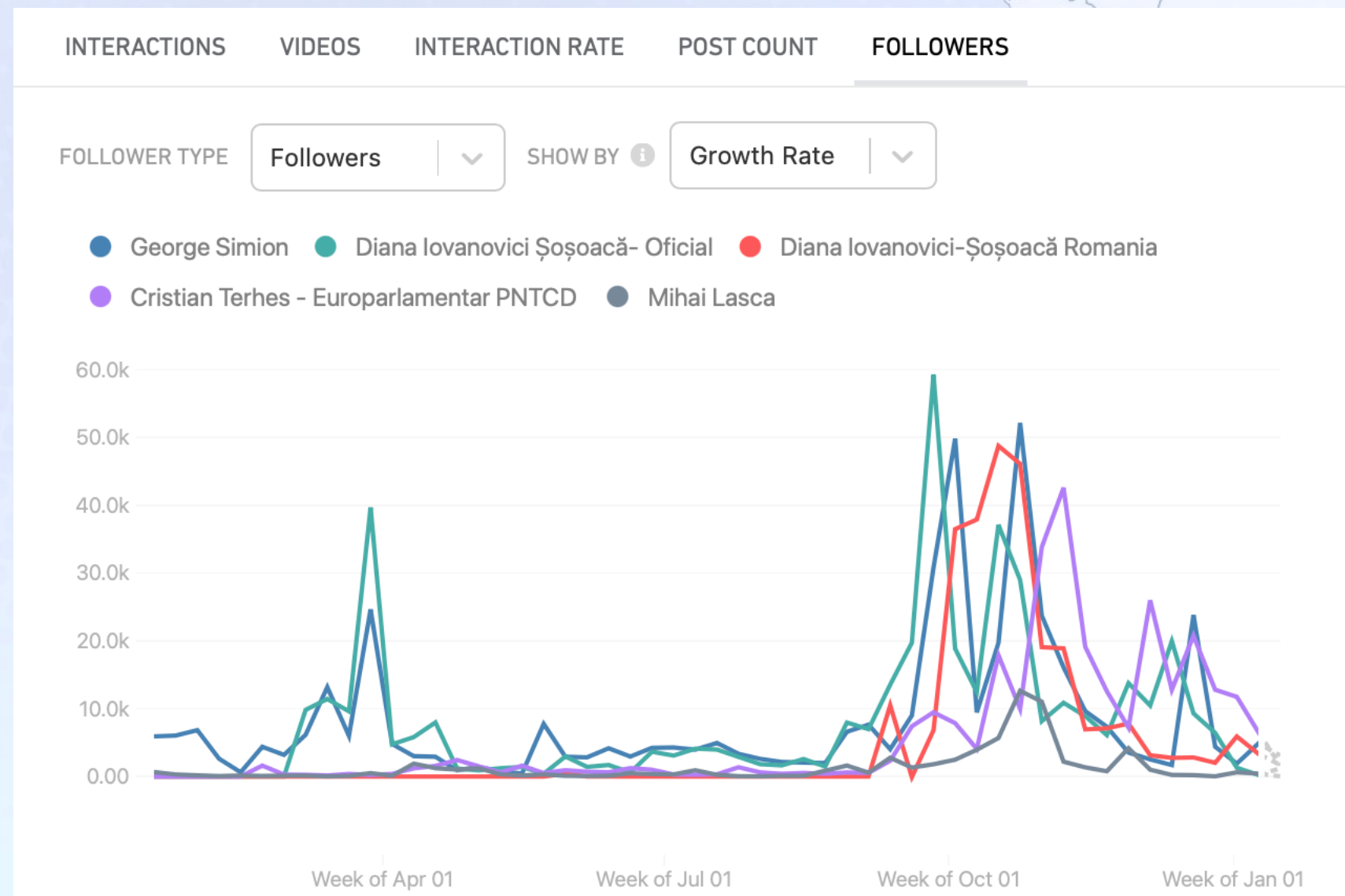


Populist messages online – last year

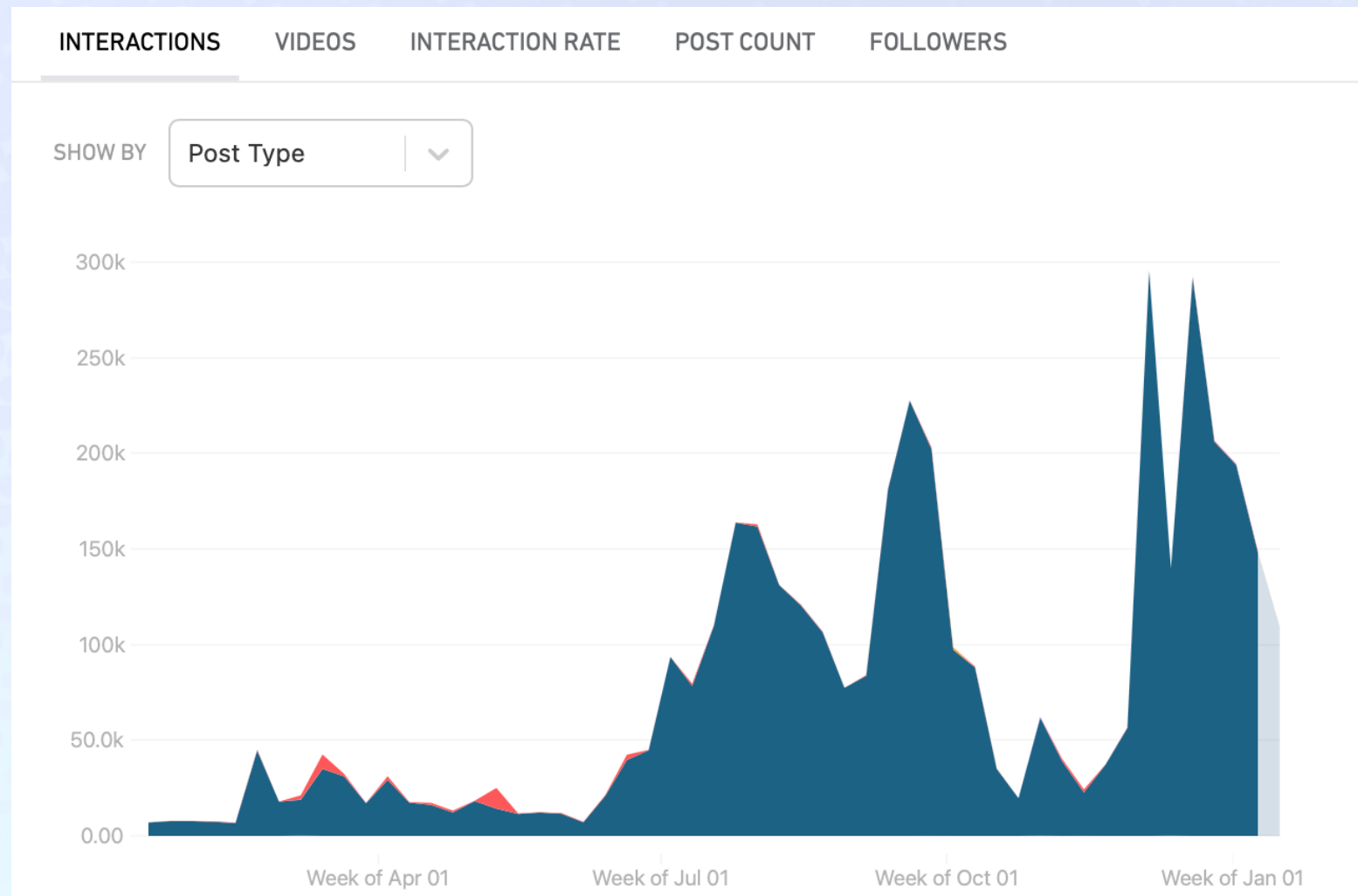


Last fall

Increased visibility on Facebook for anti-Western influencers in Romania















Sputnik in Romania



Increased interaction level of the Romanian Sputnik Facebook page, starting with summer 2021

Before the start of the Ukraine War, Sputnik Moldova – Romania was one of the most active pages from the Sputnik network



Posts		Leaderboard	Notifications		Manage	
All Posts ▾		Custom Date Range ▾	Any Page Size ▾		By Followers ▾	
08/01/2021		-	01/21/2022		Go	
Page Name	Total Interactions	Interaction Rate	Avg. Posts Per Day	Views on Owned Videos	Page Followers	Growth % and #
Average Total	570,386.88	0.219%	25.01	5.55M	167,538.20	+1.07%
1  Sputnik Arabic سبوتنيك عربي	5.84M	0.029%	51.14	62.81M	2,382,770	+11.23% +240,573
2  Sputnik Moldova-România	3.15M	2.79%	24.29	175,864	29,079	+19.90% +4,827
3  Sputnik Ελλάδα	2.19M	0.091%	64.72	42.79M	220,402	+7.95% +16,235
4  Sputnik Србија	2.14M	0.146%	36.16	15.35M	241,582	+8.66% +19,246
5  Sputnik Česká republika	2.12M	0.226%	40.72	39.60M	139,386	+11.35% +14,207
6  Sputnik Mundo	2.12M	0.051%	41.24	9.43M	583,398	+3.98% +22,341
7  Sputnik Việt Nam	1.93M	0.185%	27.17	44.28M	238,475	+17.29% +35,149
8  Sputnik Türkiye	1.34M	0.016%	114.8	3.19M	421,520	+2.18% +8,989
9  Sputnik Brasil	1.20M	0.831%	29.37	5.25M	32,699	+38.48% +9,087
0  Sputnik France	1.00M	0.01%	73.7	4.43M	782,299	-0.99% -7,848
1  SNA	725,842	0.145%	13.21	5.00M	217,553	+0.05% +116
2  Sputnik Italia	504,420	0.022%	31.86	6.60M	418,096	+5.09% +20,250

References & useful online resources

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2018/05/14/media-western-europe-how-this-study-measures-populism/>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1354068820927686>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/12/5-key-takeaways-about-populism-and-the-political-landscape-in-western-europe/>
- https://www.zora.uzh.ch/id/eprint/185164/8/Popatt_MeasEq_Text_revision_06-03.pdf
- <http://flavioazevedo.com/stats-and-r-blog/2020/9/9/populism>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01402382.2011.616665>
- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/8mergw8bb5l9zbz/Global%20Party%20Survey2.pptx?dl=0>
- <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/WMGTNS>
- <https://www.globalpartysurvey.org/people>
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1354068820927686>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/07/12/in-western-europe-populist-parties-tap-anti-establishment-frustration-but-have-little-appeal-across-ideological-divide/#people-who-hold-populist-views-are-more-unhappy-with-institutions-economy-and-immigration>
- <http://revistapolis.ro/documente/revista/2021/Polis%20nr%2034.pdf>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/30/those-on-ideological-right-favor-fewer-covid-19-restrictions-in-most-advanced-economies/>
- Atitudini și discursuri populiste în România. Dinamici în 233 2019-2021 și posibile explicații ale impactului AUR. Dan SULTĂNESCU, Bogdan TEODORESCU, Dana C. SULTĂNESCU, pp 233-253, Volum IX, Nr. 4 (34), Serie nouă, septembrie-noiembrie 2021





More about our work on
snspa.ro | civicparticipation.ro

Data sources:

Facebook – Zelist Monitor & CrowdTangle

Online searches – Google Trends

CPD reports – evaluating populism & anti-Western messages

Surveys – 9 studies, during 2019-2022



CPD

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