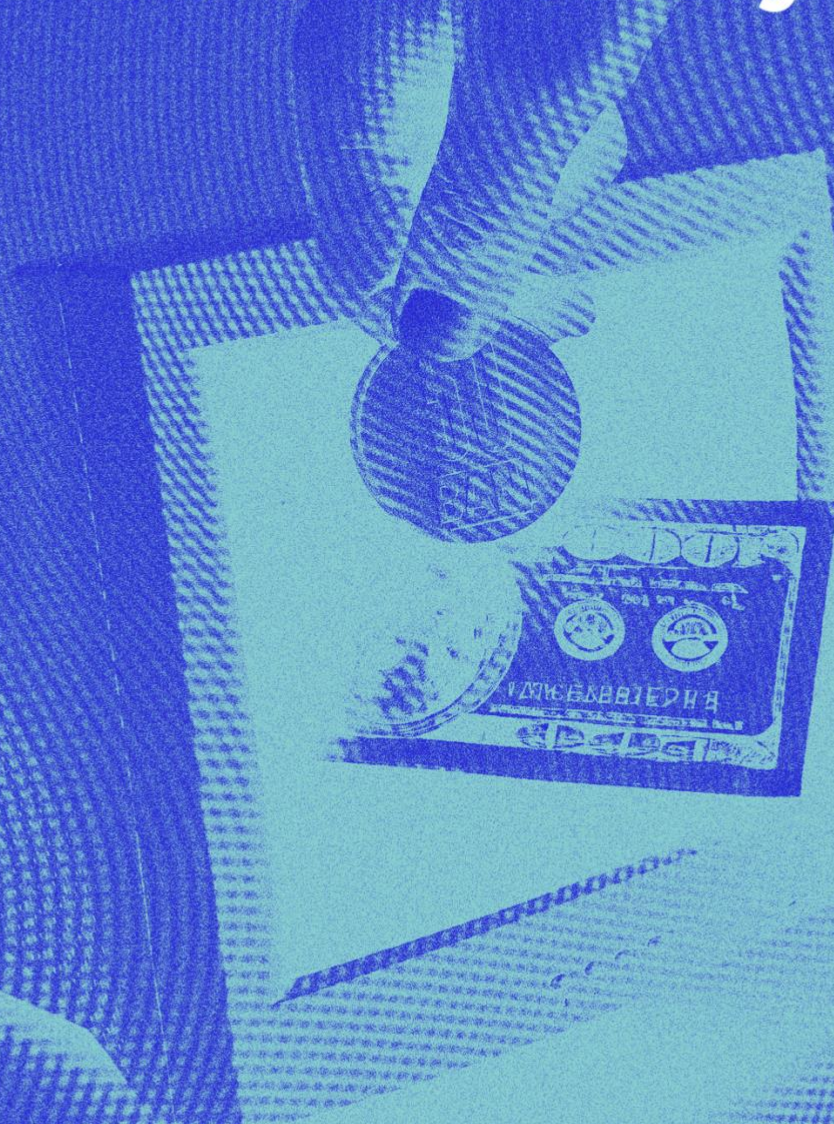


Online political advertising

where did the money go?



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for Electoral Systems

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Author: Septimius Pârvu

Data collection: Septimius Pârvu, Alexandru Popescu, Diana Vasiliu, Nelea Angheleanu

Data processing and graphics: Alexandru Popescu, Răzvan Zamfira ([Interrobang!](#))

Cover & translation – Ștefan Popa

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What is political advertising and where does the money come from?

In Romania, there is no definition of political advertising outside election campaigns. According to a draft law under review by the Parliament, which includes a possible definition, political advertising would be "*expenditure of any kind for the preparation, placement, promotion, publication or broadcasting, by any means, of messages of political parties or of any other natural or legal persons representing them, acting on their behalf or promoting their political objectives, regardless of the medium used.*"¹ For the electoral campaign, according to Law 334/2006, a propaganda material is:

- in audio, video, or written format
- refers directly to a clearly identified candidate or political party participating in an election or referendum
- is used during the election campaign period, determined according to the laws on the organization of elections
- has an electoral objective and is aimed at the general public;
- exceeds the limits of journalistic activities to inform the public.

The proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on transparency and targeting in political advertising further defines its component elements:

*The supply of and demand for political advertising are growing and increasingly cross-border in nature. A large, diversified and increasing number of services are associated with that activity, such as political consultancies, advertising agencies, "ad-tech" platforms, public relations firms, influencers and various data analytics and brokerage operators. Political advertising can take many forms including paid content, sponsored search results, paid targeted messages, promotion in rankings, promotion of something or someone integrated into content such as product placement, influencers and other endorsements. Related activities can involve for instance the dissemination of political advertising upon request of a sponsor or the publication of content against payment or other forms of remuneration, including benefits in kind.*²

Google and Facebook³ start from the idea of *issue-based* advertising, which is not strictly limited to the page of a politician or a political party. Facebook adds ads that reflect social issues, which are sensitive, strongly debated and highly politicised topics that can influence many people and affect the outcome of elections or result in legislation, in addition to clearly political or electoral ads.⁴ The rules are similar for Instagram (also part of the Meta company)⁵. Authorized entities will only be able to run ads in the country in which they are authorized and can be paid only in lei. Authorization to promote such ads is required for an ad that:

- *Is made by, on behalf of or about a candidate for public office, a political figure, a political party, a political action committee or advocates for the outcome of an election to public office*

¹ <https://expertforum.ro/comentarii-parlament-lege334/>

² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0027_RO.html

³ <https://www.facebook.com/business/m/election-integrity>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/gpa/resources/election-integrity>

⁵ <https://help.instagram.com/118613625676963>

- *Is about any election, referendum or ballot initiative, including "get out the vote" or election information campaigns*
- *Is about any social issue in any place where the ad is being run*
- *is regulated as political advertising⁶*

YouTube (Google) requires users to flag whether the uploaded video contains paid advertising⁷, and ads served on YouTube are subject to Google Ads policies⁸. Google distinguishes between ads for election advertising and political advertising. Twitter only allows political advertising in certain countries, and Romania is not among them⁹. TikTok does not allow paid political advertising¹⁰. Most platforms have different rules for different countries or regions. We will elaborate on the rules for Google and Facebook in the following sections, as these are the most relevant platforms for Romania. Note that **the definitions are not necessarily very clear, and the limits of the political/electoral advertising definitions are sometimes debatable.**

Platforms that allow political/election advertising have rules for marking it. In addition, national legislation for the election campaign period also applies. Government Decision 10/334 states that electoral materials, including online materials, must be marked with the following data:

- the name of the political party, political alliance or organisation of citizens belonging to national minorities or the name of the independent candidate who commissioned them
- the name of the company that produced them;
- the unique identification code received from the Permanent Electoral Authority.

After the elections, the electoral competitors must report to the PEA the list of electoral materials, which is published on its webpage finantarepartide.ro¹¹.

In Romania, funding for online political/electoral advertising can come from several sources:

- Party funds, private or from state budget (subsidies)
- Funds of election competitors, including party or candidates - during election campaigns
- Campaigns paid for by individuals, including politicians
- Campaigns paid for by other entities, such as online publications (sometimes for political promotion of a party or politician) or non-governmental organisations

⁶ <https://transparency.fb.com/en-gb/policies/ad-standards/siep-advertising/siep/>

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/our-commitments/supporting-political-integrity/#political-advertising>

⁸ <https://support.google.com/adspolicy/answer/6014595?hl=ro>

⁹ <https://business.twitter.com/en/help/ads-policies/ads-content-policies/political-content.html>

¹⁰ <https://ads.tiktok.com/help/article/tiktok-advertising-policies-ad-creatives-landing-page-prohibited-content?lang=en>

¹¹ <https://finantarepartide.ro/materiale-de-propaganda-liste-furnizori-campanii-electorale/>

Methodology

For the analysis we used various data, provided by Facebook and Google, which we enriched with external information, as explained below.

For Facebook we used:

- Spending reports
- Data extracted using API - daily expenditure. A significant part of the expenditure data we obtained from the UK project Who Targets Me (<https://trends.whotargets.me/countries>), which also partially supported us in interpreting the data.
- Other publicly available Facebook data extracts
- Ad Library for detailed analyses

For Google we used:

- Expenditure reports
- Transparency centre for detailed analyses

In order to make a more detailed analysis of how much the parties spent in total, EFOR built a list in which it added another indicator, namely the party or entity (NGO, publication, institution, etc.) with which the page is associated. In other words, the analysis does not only include the main party page but also other pages that could be associated, such as those of leaders, parliamentarians, MEPs, local elected officials, local branch pages or other campaign pages. We note that we made these links for **over 10,000 of the 26,000+ pages**, but that represents over 95% of the money spent. The data processing was done according to the list of existing pages as of October, so we may have missed some data. However, EFOR will update regularly to ensure that we include the relevant pages, without necessarily aiming to include all pages.

To build these relationships we also used information from other EFOR databases, such as the political financing database and the candidate database, both accessible on the www.banipartide.ro portal. Although it partially simplified our analysis, we note that many pages were also checked manually as the names did not fully match or there were other inadequacies. The analysis does not include all pages, but covers most of the expenditure financially.

For Facebook, there are many pages that have promoted in Romania, but for very small amounts, under 100 lei. As we don't know the exact amounts, we have replaced them with 50 lei as an average, assuming that in some cases 10-20 lei were spent and in others 80-90 lei. Even if this is not an exact amount, it broadly reflects how much the parties spent.

Data limitations:

- Some politicians have switched many parties and it is difficult to link a single party to their account. We identified politicians who have switched between 2-3 parties during the period analysed. One politician changed four parties in half

a year. Moreover, political and electoral coalitions and alliances complicated the analysis even more. In this respect, we have assigned a certain party to an account for the whole period, which may generate some deviations, but we believe it still reflects the overall picture.

- Given that Facebook is a platform where new accounts appear all the time, it is possible that certain pages have appeared and promoted advertisements and the publication of this report. However, we believe that the EFOR database includes most of the relevant pages, which reflect the majority of political advertising spend.
- Since FB provides expense reports for certain periods - as mentioned above - we do not have detailed lists of daily expenses from 2019 onwards, but only for 2023. For the period 2019-2023 we have included general statistics.
- On Facebook, in very many cases, expenses are not listed with a concrete figure, but only ≤ 100 . This made it difficult to calculate the exact expenditure. This text has been replaced by 50 lei, which can create some differences in some calculations.
- In the case of Facebook, we have range-type spending data, which can affect the accurate understanding of spending.

Main conclusions

- Between 2019 and 2023, almost 100 million lei were spent on political, electoral and social issues through Facebook/Instagram (80 million lei) and Google/Youtube (18 million lei) ads by parties, media, and other stakeholders¹². Of this total, approximately 80% can be directly associated with political parties or politicians.
- More than half of this money was spent by PSD, PNL and USR.
- USR invested the most in online communication, followed by PSD and PNL. However, in terms of the number of Facebook ads, PNL was the most active, with over 70 thousand ads, significantly behind PSD and USR.
- Campaigns with more than 10 million Google views are centered around elections and are relatively few. Facebook has been a much more heavily used resource.
- The parties had different strategies for promotion in terms of visual methods and targeting indicators. On Google, more images (55%) and video (40%) were used. On both Facebook and Google, most of the money was concentrated on Bucharest, but also on some counties with important municipalities such as Cluj, Brasov, Iasi, or Times.
- On Facebook, spending on main party pages accounts for 20-30% of total spending associated with a party. Most parliamentary parties also invested heavily in the pages of their leaders or former leaders, but PNL is rather an exception to this rule. No money was invested in the SOS Romania or Diana Șoșoacă pages, and AUR spent relatively little money.

¹² In addition to parties and politicians, advertisements are paid for by publications, NGOs or commercial companies.

- Among the most active promoters of political ads on Facebook are several publications. Some of these have no content of their own but only promote articles from other publications, which suggests that they may be paid to promote or discredit certain parties. We have identified several publications that over-promote certain parties. The analysis identifies several such pages that support AUR, but also other parties such as PSD, PNL, or USR/Plus.
- Party promotion is not only done through the obvious party pages but also through such publications or blogs, which makes the funder hard to identify, even if they are assumed. In election campaigns or referendums, some of these pages might have an impact, but they are not seen as third parties supporting a competitor, which reduces the effectiveness of control and the overall transparency of the campaign. Moreover, the transparency of the real beneficiary of a paid campaign remains problematic in some cases.
- Existing data does not allow a better understanding of how subsidies are spent. However, we can conclude that online advertising is a tiny part of political advertising. In 2023, parties spent 110 million lei on press and propaganda from subsidies for the first 11 months, but Facebook's ad library shows no more than 9 million. Also, since 2021 more than 273 million lei have been spent on propaganda from subsidies, which far exceeds online advertising. This shows us that **much of the advertising money is not going into promotional campaigns on social media platforms, but instead goes to websites, TV and radio.**

Google

Google allows content of a political nature, which can include ads for political organisations/politics, promotion or fundraising for political causes and candidates. Specifically, in the EU it allows promotion for a party, politician or candidate for the EU Parliament or for a national institution, but also for a referendum question put to a vote, a referendum campaign group or a call to vote related to a national, state or provincial referendum on sovereignty.

Restricted Advertisers may run EU Election Ads in the EU only if the advertiser completes EU Election Ads verification and may run campaigns outside the EU if the advertiser has completed either Election Ads or Advertiser Identity verification¹³.

Google's advertising policy allows four criteria to be used for targeting users for election ads:

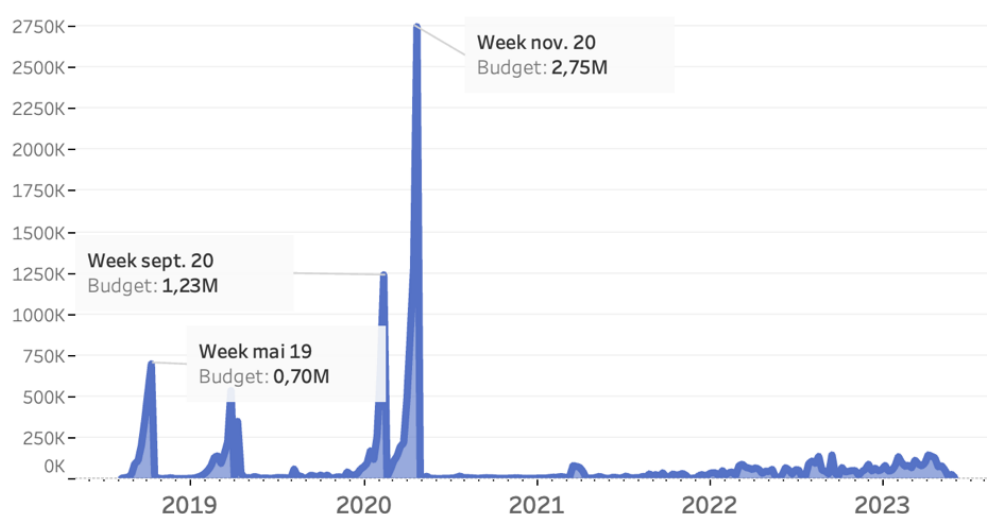
- geographical location (cannot promote for the radius around a location);
- age;
- sex;
- context-sensitive targeting options such as ad placement destinations, topics or keywords in websites, apps, pages and videos.

¹³ <https://support.google.com/adspolicy/answer/6014595?hl=en#zippy=%2Ceuropean-union-eu-election-ads%2Cadvertiser-verification-requirement-for-eu-election-ads>

Promotion can be done by organisations or individuals, who are confirmed by Google based on their identity and eligibility to promote ads in the region. Ads are promoted through Google Ads and Google Display & Video 360. Data related to ads, including images/video or links are published on the transparency platform - [Advertising Transparency Center](#) - , and the data is available in the EU from 21 March 2019.

In Romania, by 10 January 2024, 82,390 advertisements worth 18 million lei were posted. The highest expenditure was made during election periods, with the months with the highest values being September (460K EUR), November (725K EUR) and December 2020 (435K EUR). For the 2019 presidential elections, expenditure was lower, and for the EP elections, 347K EUR worth of ads were paid in May.

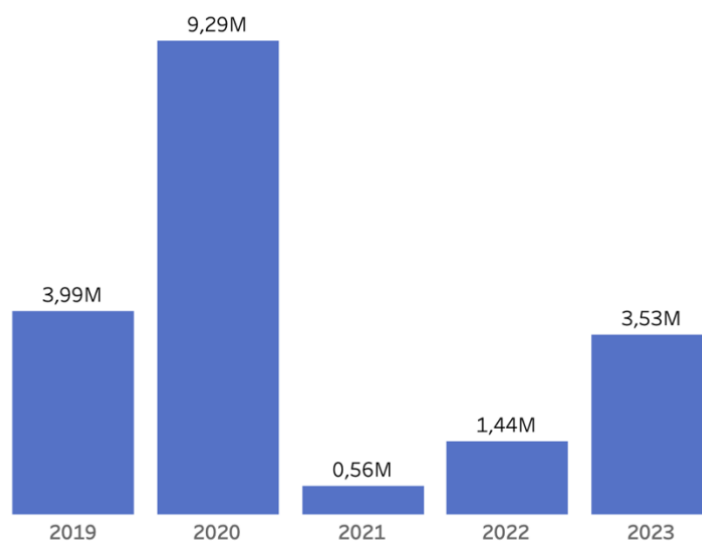
Cummulated weekly expenditures during 2019-2023 (mil. RON)



Source: Google Political Ads Transparency Center (<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?topic=political®i..>)

In 2021 and 2022 spending was reduced, increasing again in 2023, which may indicate preparation for this year's elections.

Yearly expenditures during 2019-2023 (mil. RON)



Source: Google Political Ads Transparency Center (<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?topic=political®i..>)

Individual political parties or politicians can also spend in other countries. However, the data shows that in addition to the almost 18 million lei spent in the country, the advertisers spent insignificant amounts in other countries, except for promoters such as the European Parliament or Renew Europe. European political parties or political groups also spent in Romania. Of these, Renew Europe spent the most: 366K lei. All parties also spent money abroad, especially in the context of the European Parliament elections.

In order to calculate how much the parties paid in total, including the official page, pages of leaders, affiliates or other party members, we made an association of each advertiser with the party they might be linked to. It's not simple, because some parties have several advertisers associated, different for current use and election periods. For example, the PSD has used the ID AR01861182914755035137 since 2019, while the ID AR12752997876062224385 was only used during the 2020 presidential election.

Some parties have worked with consultancy firms, and on the platform provided by Google one cannot see the name of the party, only the name of the company that promoted the ad. EFOR has analysed the advertisements published by these firms and determined which parties they have contracted with. For example, Amerisoft SRL, which has 6,850 ads, has advertised for several parties, including AUR and PMP. Guess Computers SRL has ads for PSD, PUSL and ALDE. Atelierul de Internet SRL has advertised for Renew, Reper, USR or PLUS. Duoline Studio SRL ran ads for Pro Romania, Green Party, USR or PLUS.

Including all associated advertisers, the largest part of the expenditure was made by USR (6 mil), PSD (4 mil), PNL (3.3 mil), Pro Romania (1.2 mil) and PMP (0.7 mil), plus funds from advertisements where the source could not be clearly identified. AUR has posted through two advertisers ads worth 30K lei, plus those promoted through Amerisoft SRL, which are calls for protests in 2022 and 2023.

Top 10 advertisers by value

It amounts to 13 of the total 18 million lei spent

Advertiser ID	Advertiser	Party	EUR*	RON
AR02360702179808903169	"Union Save Romania" Party	USR	1.083.900	5.091.250
AR01861182914755035137	SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY - P.S.D.	PSD	656.550	3.138.000
AR05438448393770762241	Future Innovation SRL	GNP	227.900	1.050.750
AR17075749830896123905	NATIONAL LIBERAL PARTY	GNP	216.200	964.750
AR16005863444418920449	AMERISOFT SRL	PMP, AUR	149.350	706.250
AR17000701565230645249	ETIS DESIGN SRL	GNP	124.300	591.500
AR03381007051504222209	Save Romania Union Party	USR	119.450	512.500
AR03600979745803599873	CARROT MEDIA SRL	PRORO	99.400	434.000
AR09578769379324067841	Pro Romania Party	PRORO	78.950	380.000
AR08091490786757050369	PARTY ALLIANCE OF LIBERALS AND DEMOCRATS-ALDE	ALDE	67.450	316.750

** the EUR value may include ads promoted in other currencies, meaning the total value including RON and other currencies*

The graph below illustrates the number of advertisers IDs that are associated with a party. In cases where we have consultancy companies that have done promotion consultancy it is difficult to discern how much the promotion costs were for each party.

Party (own calculation)	Corresponding advertiser IDs	RON
AUR	2	30.250
INDEPENDENT	2	6.500
PMP	24	742.250
PMP, AUR	1	706.250
GNP	38	3.364.000
PNL, PMP	1	61.750
PNL, USR, PLUS	1	9.250
PRORO	12	1.215.250
PRORO, ALDE	1	186.500
PRORO, PVERDE, USR, PLUS	1	500
PSD	26	4.071.500
PSD, PUSL, ALDE	1	10.500
PUSL	4	215.000
RENEW, REPER, USR, PLUS	1	8.500
UDMR	4	47.000
USR	23	6.067.250

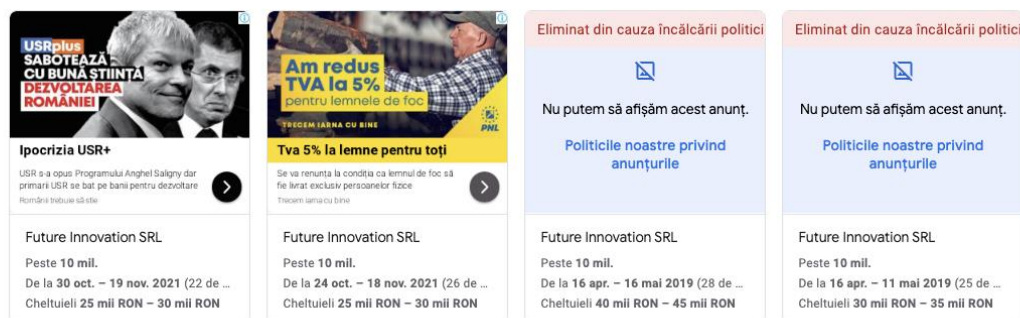
** own calculation, including only advertisers in Romania. Where there is more than one party, it means that there was a company that carried out promotional campaigns for them.*

Ads with impact over 10 million views are quite few and clustered around the elections. The [USR](#) ads are concentrated around the 2019 presidential and 2020 local elections. Two of them, from 2023, call for the resignation of Minister Lucian Bode and a statement by the party's president calling for higher salaries for teachers.

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In May 2020, the PSD promoted the slogan "*More respect for Romanians*" in two advertisements and in 2023 it paid for a campaign to promote a campaign on women's involvement in politics. [Future](#) Innovations (for PNL) promoted a negative campaign against USR in 2021 criticising the party's opposition to the approval of the Anghel Saligny programme. This was one of the reasons why USR left the government, as the

version proposed by PNL had a high potential to generate political clientelism. Two campaigns are not accessible as they violated Google's campaign regulations. [PNL's](#) account has no campaigns with more than 10 million views.



[Pro Romania](#) has 3 ads with over 10 million views (via Carrot Media), for the parliamentary elections, one of which promotes Victor Ponta's campaign. A similar campaign promotes Victor Ponta's candidacy through the [NETWORKLD IT&C S.R.L.](#) account.

[The PMP](#) had five campaigns with over 10 million views in March-June 2023 on Romania's accession to the Schengen Area. The [ALDE](#) account promoted 2 campaigns, one of which promoted Mircea Diaconu's candidacy for the 2019 presidential elections.

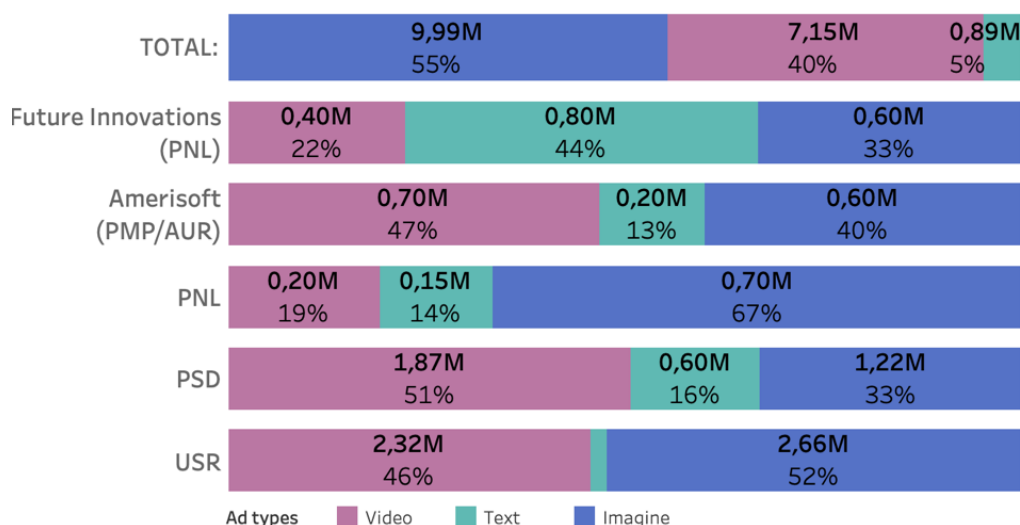


Parties had different promotion strategies, some using more static images and others opting for video promotion. Most ads used images (55%), then video (40%) and text (5%).

The data looks like this for the main promotion accounts:

- USR used image (52%), video (45%); few ads have only text (2%).
- PSD used most video (59%) and 39% image.
- Future Innovation, which worked for the PNL, used more images (54%) and video (37%).
- PNL used the majority of images (77%).
- Pro Romania promotion accounts used above-average text in the main images (approx. 65%) and text compared to the other parties.
- AUR used mostly images (94%) and video (6%).

Ratio and budget by types of ads during 2019-2023 (mil. RON)



Source: Google Political Ads Transparency Center (<https://adstransparency.google.com/political?topic=political®i..>)

EFOR identified several accounts of advertisers who have almost exclusively paid for negative campaigns against other parties. In these cases, it is difficult to identify the beneficiary party, as the payments were made through a company. The identified advertisers who behaved in this way are Divergent Grup SRL, KEFA DESIGN S.R.L, Modern Art Design, TSM New Project, MAUR CONSULTING & COMMUNICATION SRL. For example, Divergent Grup is a company registered in Bacău that carried out campaigns before the local elections and at the end of 2022 against USR/PNL and the USR mayor of Bacău, amounting to 48 thousand lei.

Negative campaigns can also be found on the assumed profiles of political parties. For example, Future Innovation's ads for PNL include negative ads against PSD or USR. And USR have a relatively high number of ads criticising PSD/PNL.

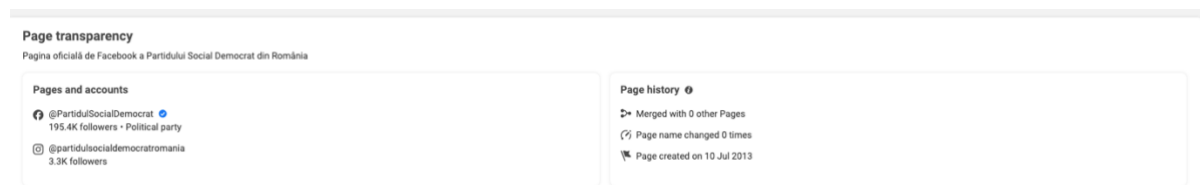


Facebook

What data does Facebook provide?

Facebook offers several types of data access. On the one hand, there is the [Ad Library](#) platform, where one can search by pages/advertisements or keywords and where their

ads are accessible. For each page, statistics are displayed for the individual ads (cost, promotion period, impact) owner and audience. The browsing timeline for aggregated statistics is grouped in several options and can be shown for at most 90 days. In addition, one can download a report for that page showing detailed data about each ad.



Facebook also allows access to spending reports¹⁴. Data can be displayed for the last day, a week, 30 days, 90 days, or the whole period since the information is published. Spending data is displayed for location, where the location is a county. Alternatively, the data - including each ad with spend details and *targeting* information - can be extracted via an [API](#).

According to reports published by Facebook, as of January 7, 2024, 80 million lei had been spent on 388,913 ads in the political/electoral/social category. In total, there were 22,641 unique page IDs for which promotion was done. Many of these IDs do not appear to be politically related and invested relatively small amounts. These pages also include those of music bands, travel, business, and magazine magazines (17,000 out of over 27,000 total number of page IDs, including duplicates). Most of these have values marked as ≤ 100 , which can mean spending between 1 leu and 99 lei.

Promotion is not available for individual accounts (which are not pages) or for groups. In theory, payment can only be made for Romania and only in lei, unlike Google, where an entity can promote itself in other countries in the EU.

Facebook includes political advertising in a broader category, about social issues, elections or politics, and the sponsor is required to disclose that the ad is paid for. Where ads run without a disclaimer, the sentence *These ads ran without a disclaimer* will be marked. This means that after the ads started running, Facebook determined that they should be marked as such and required labelling. In these cases, the ads were stopped.

Some pages may be associated with more than one disclaimer. The disclaimer of the advertisement can be the party itself (e.g. central body, parliamentary group, financial officer for elections or a local branch), a person or a consultancy company. In some cases, ads are promoted by an online publication, especially in an electoral context. For example, the PNL page has 9 different disclaimers, and in two cases the ad ran without a disclaimer.

Some important transparency issues:

¹⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=onboarding>

- Party promotion is not only done through official pages and those of party members or elected officials, but also through pages such as [Dezvoltăm România](#) (PNL, used in 2019 and 2020) or *Fără Penalii în Funcții Publice* (USR/Plus), which can be party-specific campaigns. In some cases, the name of the party or a member does not appear as such in the transparency data.

Expenditure statistics

The biggest spender was the European Parliament (non-political ads), which added up ads of 4.8 million lei, followed by the PNL, USR and PSD pages. USR was also associated to top spenders such as the USR-Plus Alliance, USR Chair Cătălin Drulă and the *Fără Penalii în Funcții Publice* campaign. In the PSD category there is also the page of the party chair Marcel Ciolacu.

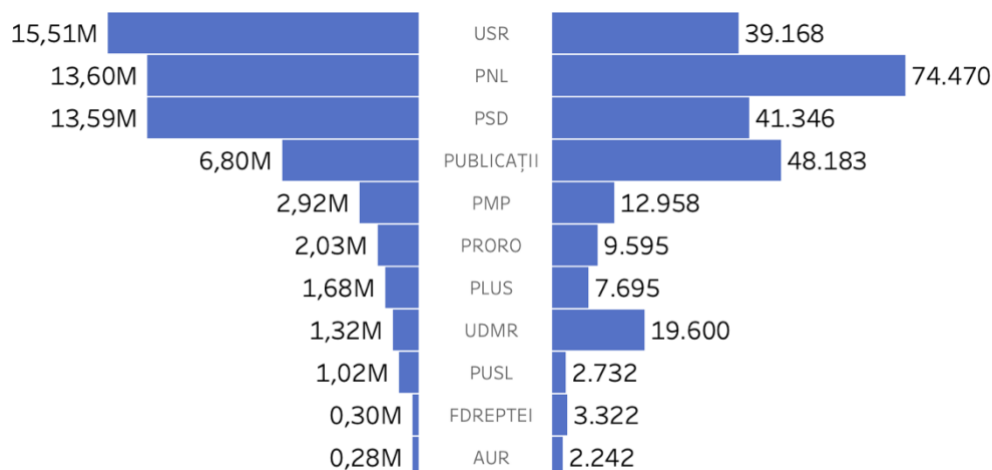
Top 20 FB spending, calculated based on page IDs (2019-2023)

FB page name	RON	FB page name	RON
<i>European Parliament</i>	4.886.548	<i>Ziarul Puterea</i>	583.263
<i>Partidul Național Liberal</i>	4.003.403	<i>Newsweek Romania</i>	573.785
<i>USR</i>	3.344.978	<i>Guvernare.net</i>	553.583
<i>Partidul Social Democrat</i>	3.025.841	<i>Dan Barna</i>	537.151
<i>Alianța USR PLUS</i>	2.377.744	<i>Viorica Vasilica Dăncilă</i>	494.382
<i>Marcel Ciolacu</i>	2.264.112	<i>Declic</i>	481.123
<i>European Commission</i>	1.446.032	<i>Politice.net</i>	468.419
<i>Cătălin Drulă</i>	1.216.211	<i>ASAP România*</i>	438.670
<i>Fără Penalii în Funcții Publice</i>	1.033.532	<i>RMDSZ</i>	422.429
<i>Ioana Ramona Bruynseels</i>	671.474	<i>Litere.net</i>	402.799

** an environmental project managed by the Institute*

The party that has invested most money online between 2019-2023 is USR (including the USR-PLUS Alliance), followed by PSD and PNL at a very short distance. However, **in terms of the number of ads, the most active seems to have been PNL**, with over 70 thousand ads, while PSD and USR published 41 thousand and 39 thousand ads respectively.

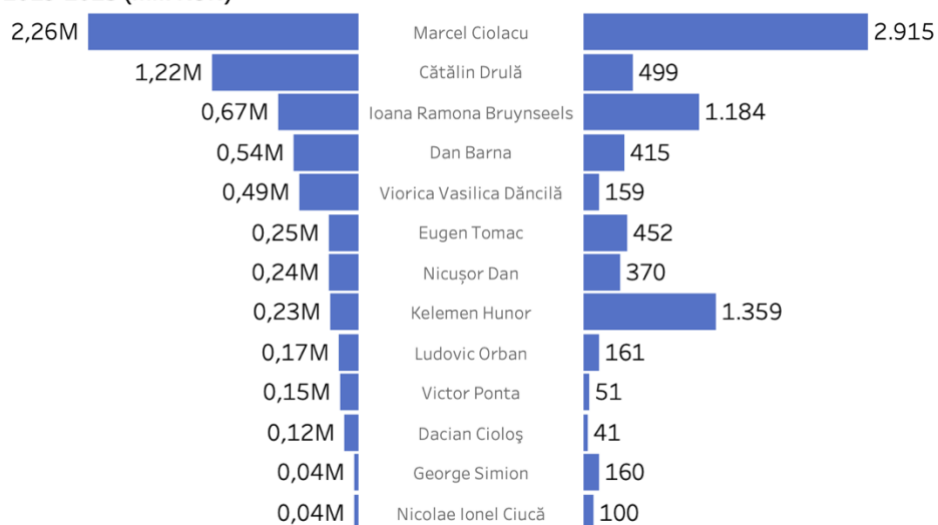
Publication expenditure compared to estimated number of ads from 2019-2023 (mil. RON)



Source: Facebook Ad Library Report (<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=nav-header>)

A brief analysis of the party pages of some leaders or former leaders or politicians who have influence in the party leadership shows that **PSD and USR remain the parties with the highest expenditure**. The pages of Marcel Ciolacu and Cătălin Drulă invested the most in paid advertising.

Publicity expenditures of party leaders compared to estimated number of ads from 2019-2023 (mil. RON)



Source: Facebook Ad Library Report (<https://www.facebook.com/ads/library/report/?source=nav-header>)

Among the **most active promoters of political advertisements are several publications** such as *Ziarul Puterea*, *Newsweek Romania*, *Guvernare.net*, *Politice.net* or *Litere.net*. The ads promoted by the latter three rather contain articles by other publications, which may indicate that they may take up certain political topics at the behest of certain parties. Litere.net and Politice.net are owned by Stative Media, which was contracted by PSD¹⁵. In the case of Litere.net only a third of the links promoted

¹⁵ <https://pressone.ro/reteaua-9x9-cum-ne-manipuleaza-baietii-destepti-ai-internetului-cu-bani-de-la-partid>

are related to the site, the rest linking to websites such as stiripesurse.ro, g4media.ro or libertatea.ro. Readblog.news had the same type of behaviour, promoting links to other publications, but is no longer active. Another account, NewsFalcon, which is not associated to a website, promoted 56 advertisements for 81,629 lei, all referring to articles from other publications. The salvamromania.org page spent 366 thousand lei, for 276 advertisements, linked to very different publications (including its own website) and which seem to favour USR-PLUS in particular. The Political Investigation Group page (GIP is run by Mugur Ciuvică) spent 259 thousand lei on 160 ads. The Online Report page published 106 ads worth 76,343 lei, with links both on its own page and to online publications - note that the <https://on-report.com> page has articles until 2020 that appear to support the PNL, while promotion continues until 2023.

We also identified ghost pages such as NewsGroup.biz, which spent 72,657 lei, but whose content has been blocked and which has no online presence, the site is not functional (no history of content either, the information was checked with the Web Archive). The ads are from 2020, and the page distributed links where articles critical of several parties were published. But in this case, it is impossible to identify who paid for the ads.

Top 10 online publications by expenditure

FB Page	No ads	Expenses (RON)
Ziarul Puterea	7.591	583.263
Newsweek Romania	4.642	573.785
Guvernare.net	405	553.583
Politice.net	519	468.419
Litere.net	416	402.799
Stiri Locale	449	393.210
Readlog	317	304.538
News.ro	1.178	201.234
BZI	803	138.554
AFACERI.news	651	114.408

Top 10 pages by number of ads

FB Page	RON	No ads
Declic *	481.123	7.762
Ziarul Puterea	583.263	7.591
Partidul Național Liberal	4.003.403	5.510
Newsweek Romania	573.785	4.642
European Parliament	4.886.548	3.782
Daniel Buda	123.153	3.275
Partidul Social Democrat	3.025.841	3.256
Marcel Ciolacu	2.264.112	2.915
RMDSZ	422.429	2.442
PNL Dambovita	217.108	1.888

* non-governmental organisation specialised in petitions

Political parties promote themselves not only through their own pages, but also through online publications or other types of pages. For example, among the pages that have had a significant number of ads, we identified several promoting AUR. The one that has spent the most money is [60m.RO](https://60m.ro) (1,759 ads worth 48,238 lei), with numerous news about AUR. Many of the page's ads have been stopped, as they violate Facebook rules. The [4media.INFO](https://4media.info) page promoted 632 ads worth 16,721 lei. As in the case mentioned above, the page specializes in articles related to AUR and nationalist discourse. The next page in the top in terms of the number of ads is [Ropres.RO](https://ropres.ro) (624, worth 12,417 lei), which promotes ads almost exclusively articles about the AUR.¹⁶ [Gazetarii.RO](https://gazetarii.ro) follows the same pattern (243 ads, 6,370 lei). Slightly less was spent by [Patriotii.Info](https://patriotii.info) (170 ads, 4,028 lei), also related to AUR promotion. Similar pages are [ProPublica.RO](https://propublica.ro) (147 ads, 4,100 lei), [Comentatorii.RO](https://comentatorii.ro) (170 ads, 3,220 lei), economisti.ro (168 ads, 4,388 lei) or [Criticii.RO](https://criticii.ro) (811 ads, 12,882 lei). [Agentiadeinformatii.ro](https://agentiadeinformatii.ro) promotes many anti-PSD ads, but there are also articles praising AUR (5930 lei for 285 ads). Some of these pages were the most active in 2023 - 60m.ro, CRITICII.ro, 5news.RO, Ropres.RO or Gazetarii.ro. A common element of these publications is the lack of visibility of contact details or clear mention of owners. Also, analysis of the source code of the web pages shows that the same Wordpress theme was used.

```
'https://economistii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/base.min.css?ver=7.0.4' type='text/css'
ref='https://economistii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/style.min.css?ver=7.0.4'
Source code economistii.ro
```

```
https://60m.ro/wp-content/cache/min/1/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/base.css?ver=170490322
ref='https://60m.ro/wp-content/cache/background-css/60m.ro/wp-content/cache/min/1/wp-content/themes
Source code 60m.ro
```

```
f='https://criticii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/base.min.css?ver=7.0.4' type='text/css'
ref='https://criticii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/style.min.css?ver=7.0.4'
Source code critics.ro
```

```
href='https://agentiadeinformatii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/base.min.css?ver=7.0.5' type='text/css'
href='https://agentiadeinformatii.ro/wp-content/themes/jannah/assets/css/style.min.css?ver=7.0.5' type='text/css'
Source code agentiadeinformatii.ro
```

Pages on which most money was spent (2019-2023)

Data on the party pages where the most money was invested shows that in general between 20 and 30% of funds were spent on the party's main page. The percentages for party leaders differ: while AUR, PSD and USR seem to have spent the most on leaders' pages, while PNL is in the opposite category.

¹⁶ See also Pressone analysis - <https://pressone.ro/reteaua-de-aur-partidul-plateste-facebook-pentru-a-si-amplifica-mesajele-sub-identitati-false/> and Misreport <https://misreport.substack.com/p/special-19-publicatii-independente>. The Misreport article shows how several of these FB sites are linked to members or people around AUR.

AUR

Page	Amount spent	% of total party	Advertise
Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor - AUR	69.982	24,7	217
George Simion	40.234	14,2	160
Guvernul Nostru	21.942	7,7	55
Claudiu Târziu	13.201	4,6	37
Vasile NAGY	11.755	4,1	33

PSD

Page	Amount spent	% of total	Advertise
Partidul Social Democrat	3.025.841	22,2	3.256
Marcel Ciolacu	2.264.112	16,6	2.915
Viorica Vasilica Dăncilă	494.382	3,6	159
Marius Constantin Budăi	291.514	2,1	458
Sorin Grindeanu	259.730	1,9	326

PNL

Page	Amount spent	% of total	Advertise
Partidul Național Liberal	4.006.128	29,4	5.511
Ionel Bogdan	303.651	2,2	1.431
PNL Bucuresti	301.322	2,2	1.191
Dezvoltăm România	246.600	1,8	206
PNL Dambovita	218.190	1,6	1.894

USR

Page	Amount spent	% of total	Advertise
USR	3.350.841	21,6	1.419
Alianța USR PLUS	2.377.744	15,3	874
Cătălin Drulă	1.218.322	7,8	499
Fără Penali în Funcții Publice	1.033.004	6,6	320
Dan Barna	537.174	3,4	415

UDMR

Page	Amount spent	% of total	Advertise
RMDSZ	423.074	23,0	2.448
Kelemen Hunor	225.218	12,2	1.307
Borboly Csaba	115.298	6,2	862
Eurotrans Alapítvány	102.886	5,6	1.737
Winkler Gyula	64.769	3,5	652

PUSL

Page	Amount spent	% of total	Advertise
Ioana Ramona Bruynseels ¹⁷	671.585	65,9	1.184
Partidul Umanist Social Liberal PUSL Sediul Central	173.486	17	329
Cristian Popescu Piedone	17.449	1,7	20
Partidul Umanist Social Liberal PUSL Galați	15.998	1,5	176
Partidul Puterii Umaniste - Social Liberal Constanța	13.884	1,3	19

Where did the parties spend the money?

In the period 2019-2023, the parties spent as follows:

- The Social Democratic Party spent the most money in Bucharest (12%), then in Constanta, Brasov, Iasi and Bacau counties (4%). Covasna, Sălaj and Harghita received the most attention (0.6-0.7%).
- Liberals spent 14% in Bucharest, 5% in Maramures and 4% each in Iasi, Cluj and Mures.
- USR spent 14% in Bucharest, Iasi (6%), Maramureș 5% and Constanța, Brasov, Prahova (4%). They spent the least in Covasna, Tulcea and Giurgiu.
- UDMR spent almost all the money in Harghita (26%), Mures (18%), Cluj (12%), Covasna, Satu Mare and Bihor (9% each).
- AUR spent the most money in Bucharest (12%), Suceava (8%), Arad (6%), Hunedoara, Ilfov, Timiș (4%), and the most money was spent in Bistrița Năsăud, Covasna and Giurgiu.

Overall, **most money was spent on Bucharest (15%) and counties with important municipalities such as Cluj, Iasi, Constanta or Timis**. The counties in which the parties invested the least were those in the UDMR's area of influence (Covasna, Harghita, Mures, etc.), as well as Tulcea and Giurgiu.

¹⁷ Ioana Ramona Bruynseels joined AUR in January 2023. However, most of her spending was made while she was close to PUSL, and spending while she was in AUR is marginal, although she had about 180 paid advertisements.



Select a party
USR

Region with biggest budget:

2.303K RON

Bucharest

Region with smallest budget:

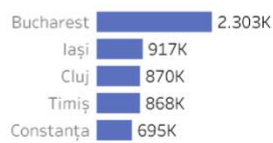
96K RON

Covasna

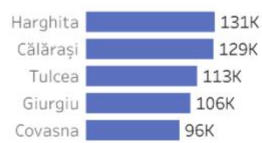
15.711K

Total Budget (RON)

Biggest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



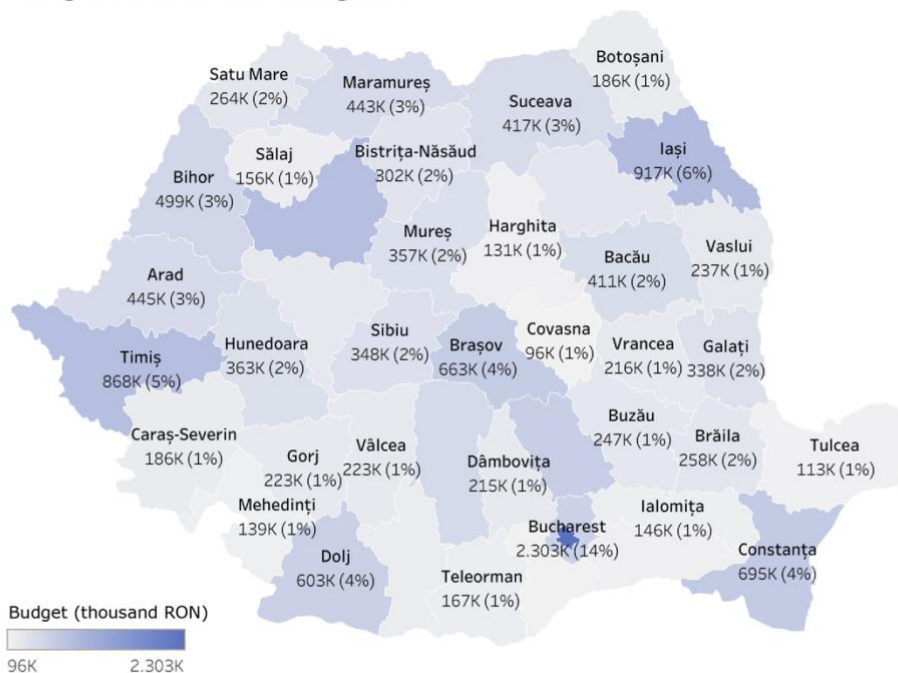
Smallest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



Top pages by cumulated budget
(thousand RON):



Budget distribution on regions





PNL

15.04.2019 - 14.01.2024

Select a party

PNL

Region with biggest budget:

1.977K RON

Bucharest

Region with smallest budget:

76K RON

Covasna

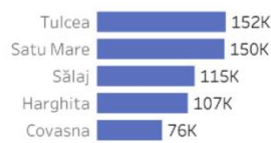
13.510K

Total Budget (RON)

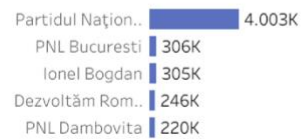
Biggest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



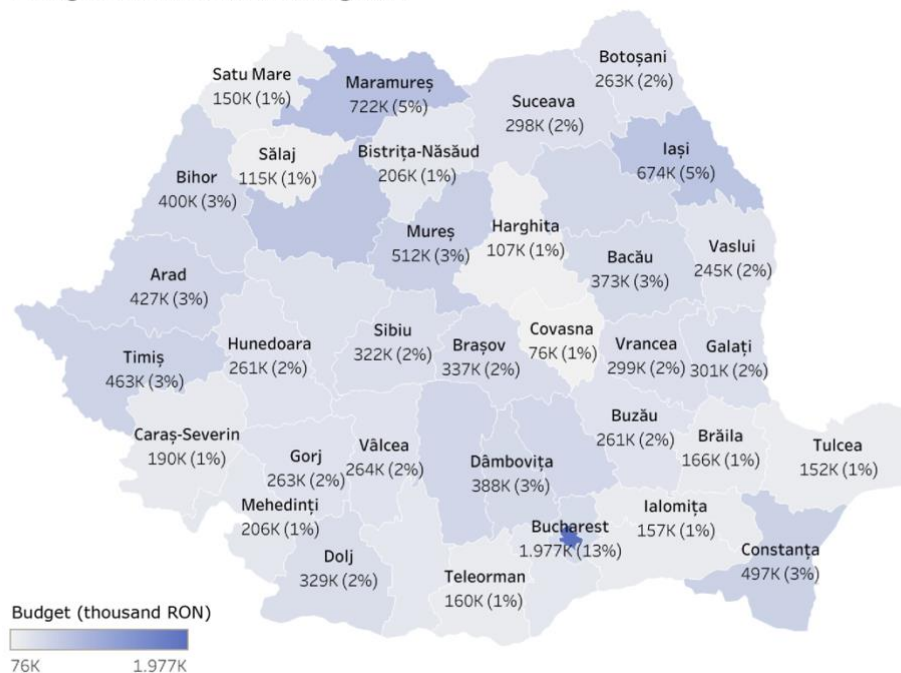
Smallest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



Top pages by cumulated budget
(thousand RON):



Budget distribution on regions





PSD

15.04.2019 - 14.01.2024

Select a party

PSD

Region with biggest budget:

1.756K RON

Bucharest

Region with smallest budget:

109K RON

Covasna

13.667K

Total Budget (RON)

Biggest regional budgets
(thousand RON):

Bucharest	1.756K
Constanța	657K
Brașov	629K
Iași	622K
Bacău	545K

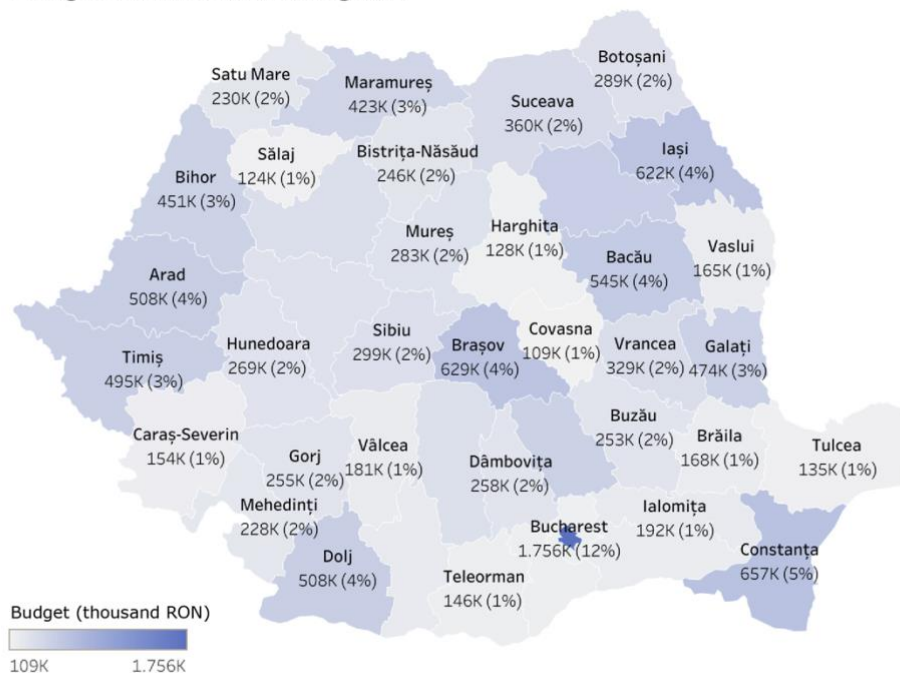
Smallest regional budgets
(thousand RON):

Ilfov	137K
Tulcea	135K
Harghita	128K
Sălaj	124K
Covasna	109K

Top pages by cumulated budget
(thousand RON):

Partidul Social ..	3.025K
Marcel Ciolacu ..	2.266K
Viorica Vasilica ..	494K
Marius Constan..	291K
Sorin Grindeanu	260K

Budget distribution on regions





15.04.2019 - 14.01.2024

Select a party

AUR

Region with biggest budget:

48K RON

Bucharest

Region with smallest budget:

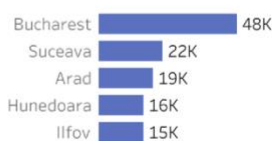
5K RON

Covasna

295K

Total Budget (RON)

Biggest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



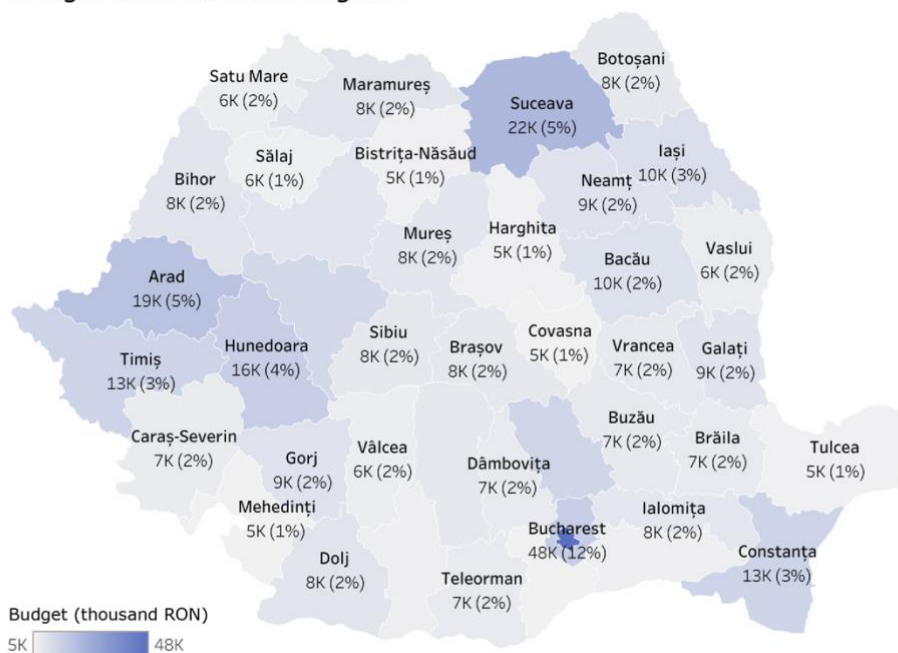
Smallest regional budgets
(thousand RON):



Top pages by cumulated budget
(thousand RON):



Budget distribution on regions



Political party spending in 2023

PSD, PNL, USR, AUR and UDMR spent 8.5 million lei in 2023, almost 70% of all political advertising. USR spent the most in the first part of the year and the most elected in the first part of the year. The rest of the parties spent relatively evenly.

Report Facebook Ads

01.01.2023 - 31.12.2023

Select party
AllTimeframe
All values

13.343K

Total budget spent

1.444

No. promoted pages

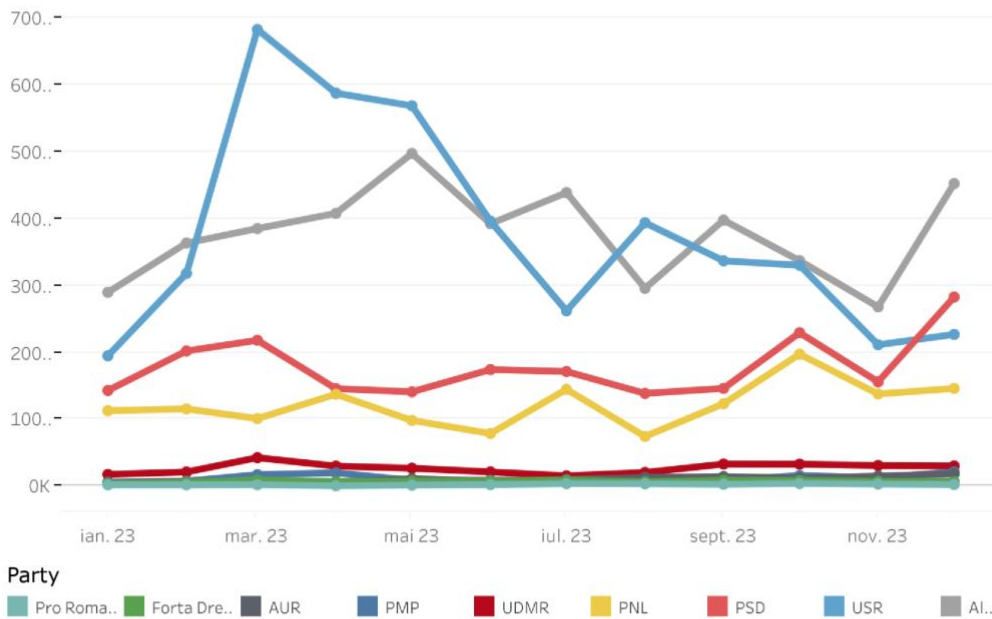
1.538

Daily average budget

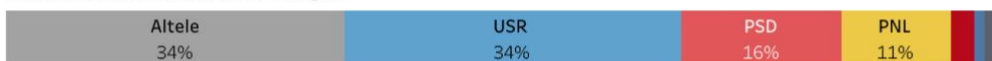
1.175

No. unique disclaymers

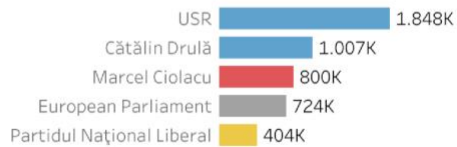
Evolution of monthly budgets:



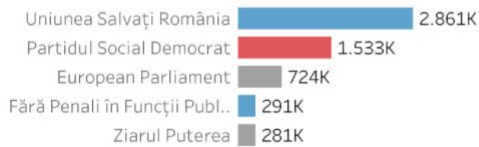
Distribution of total used budget



Top 5 pages by budget (thousands RON)



Top 5 disclaymers by invested budget (thousands RON)



Data for 2023 - PSD, PNL, USR, AUR, Forta Dreptei, PMP, Pro Romania, UDMR. The total budget is an estimate. Values of ≤ 100 have been replaced by 50 lei, which may lead to some differences. Also, given that the data is drawn from Facebook constantly for the previous day, it is possible that the information for some days has not been included in the calculation. The same applies to the graphs below.

Report Facebook Ads

01.01.2023 - 31.12.2023

Select party
USR

Timeframe
All values

4.513K

Total budget spent

264

No. promoted pages

12.677

Daily average budget

214

No. unique disclaymers

Evolution of monthly budgets:



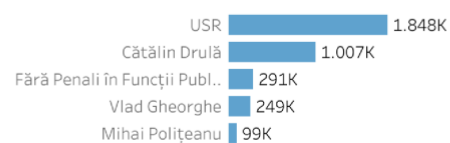
Party

■ USR

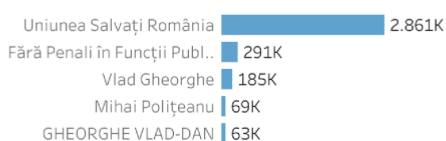
Distribution of total used budget



Top 5 pages by budget (thousands RON)



Top 5 disclaymers by invested budget (thousands RON)



* Mihai Polițeanu left USR in October 2022, since then he has been a non-attached MP. He was included in this category for reasons related to the political labelling of pages, explained in the methodology.

Report Facebook Ads

01.01.2023 - 31.12.2023

Select party
PSD

Timeframe
All values

2.148K

Total budget spent

169

No. promoted pages

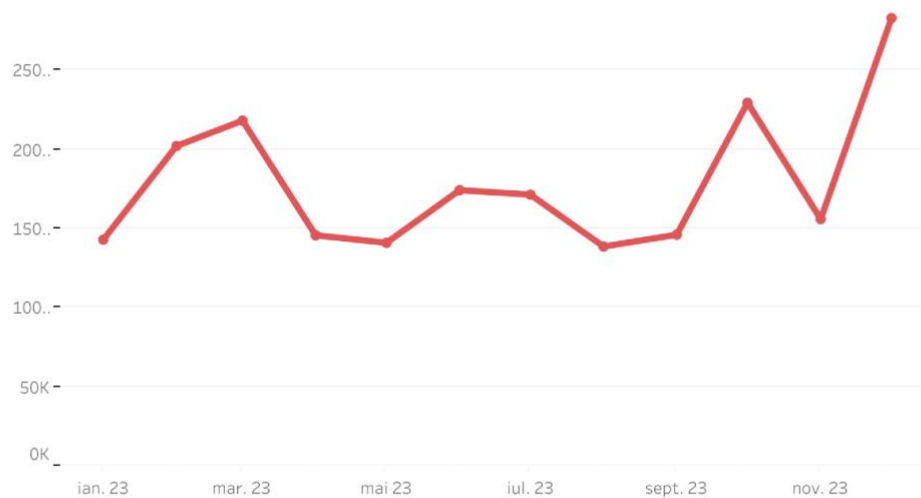
6.034

Daily average budget

161

No. unique disclaymers

Evolution of monthly budgets:



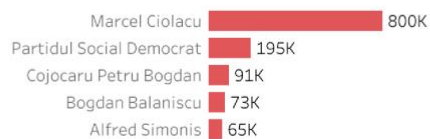
Party

PSD

Distribution of total used budget



Top 5 pages by budget (thousands RON)



Top 5 disclaymers by invested budget (thousands RON)



Report Facebook Ads

01.01.2023 - 31.12.2023

Select party
PNL

Timeframe
All values

1.466K

Total budget spent

253

No. promoted pages

4.117

Daily average budget

233

No. unique disclaymers

Evolution of monthly budgets:



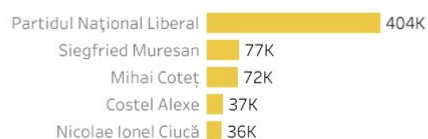
Party

PNL

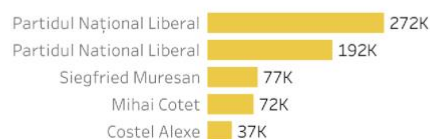
Distribution of total used budget



Top 5 pages by budget (thousands RON)



Top 5 disclaymers by invested budget (thousands RON)



Report Facebook Ads

01.01.2023 - 31.12.2023

Select party
AUR

Timeframe
All values

121K

Total budget spent

34

No. promoted pages

346

Daily average budget

27

No. unique disclaymers

Evolution of monthly budgets:



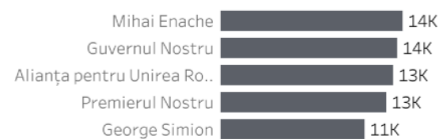
Party

■ AUR

Distribution of total used budget



Top 5 pages by budget (thousands RON)



Top 5 disclaymers by invested budget (thousands RON)



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