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From Emotion To Political Mobilisation: Fear, Anger, Hope And Indignation In Romanian Electoral Discourse

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Abstract. Contemporary political communication increasingly relies on articulating affective dimensions to produce meaning, identification, and electoral mobilisation. This article examines how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are discursively constructed and deployed in the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election campaign. Using a qualitative research design based on deductive–inductive content analysis and a structured coding framework, the study compares the discourse of six relevant political actors: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. The findings show that emotions do not function in isolation but are articulated into coherent causal sequences and discursive repertoires. The study identifies three main types of affective repertoires: the sovereigntist repertoire (centred on fear and anger/indignation directed against the system and converted into the hope of renewal); the reformist-institutional repertoire (centred on moral indignation at corruption and the risks of democratic decline, oriented towards reform); and the stability-and-continuity repertoire (institutionalised fear and hope anchored in predictability and security). The article argues that hope fulfils an essential structural function of discursive closure, offering an optimistic perspective on the future regardless of the candidate's ideological positioning.

Keywords: political communication, electoral discourse, affective repertoires, affective intelligence, 2024 presidential election, Romania

1. Introduction

Contemporary political communication takes place within a public sphere characterised by intense competition for attention, the accelerated circulation of information, and the growing importance of digital platforms in shaping political opinions. In this context, transmitting information or formulating programmatic arguments alone is no longer sufficient to secure electoral support. Political messages must produce meaning, identification, and affective responses. Emotion thus becomes a resource through which political actors interpret reality, define threats, assign responsibility, and construct perspectives on the future.

This approach is part of the expanding body of research on the role of emotions in political behaviour and communication. The affective intelligence theory developed by Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen helps move beyond the model of the exclusively rational citizen by arguing that affective and cognitive processes interact in forming political judgement. Emotion is therefore not the opposite of reason but participates in information selection, the evaluation of political situations, and the orientation of electoral behaviour (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000).

This article focuses on four central emotions—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—as relevant to understanding the affective mechanisms of electoral communication. It treats them as elements of a discursive repertoire through which political actors construct threats, assign responsibility, formulate moral judgements, and project alternatives for the future. The 2024 Romanian presidential election constitutes a relevant case for examining these mechanisms. The electoral competition unfolded against the backdrop of issues such as the war in Ukraine, security, relations with the European Union and NATO, distrust in institutions, corruption, political representation, sovereignty, and national identity. At the same time, digital communication became an important space for circulating and amplifying electoral messages. The first-round results and subsequent debates also highlighted the use of digital platforms and messages tied to geopolitical and security issues.

Against this background, the article proposes a comparative analysis of electoral communication among six actors relevant to the 2024 presidential competition: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. This selection allows comparison across actors with different political profiles and legitimising strategies, including candidates associated with populist and sovereigntist discourses, mainstream political actors, and candidates with reformist, institutional, or independent profiles. The analysis therefore highlights not the presence or absence of emotion, but the variations among the affective repertoires used by different political actors.

The research addresses three main dimensions: (1) the frequency and distribution of fear, anger, indignation, and hope in electoral communication; (2) the themes, discursive frames, and actors with which these emotions are associated; and (3) their political functions, particularly mobilisation, the delegitimisation of the opponent, the consolidation of collective identity, the moralisation of conflict, and orientation towards the future.

Building on these premises, the article formulates two research questions:

RQ1**:** How do Romanian political actors construct and deploy fear, anger, indignation, and hope as resources for electoral communication and mobilisation?

RQ2: To what extent do candidates' affective repertoires differ by political positioning and status within the electoral competition?

Through this approach, the study contributes to the literature on political communication and populism in three respects. First, it proposes conceptualising emotion as a discursive repertoire rather than as an isolated phenomenon or a mere rhetorical characteristic. Second, it compares political actors with different political positions and legitimising resources, thereby avoiding an automatic association between emotionality and populism. Third, it examines the relationship between negative and positive emotions and how they may be integrated into a single strategy of electoral mobilisation.

The research employs a qualitative methodology based on deductive–inductive analysis of electoral communication to examine how political emotions are constructed, contextualised, and discursively deployed during the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election.

The article is structured into six main sections. After the introduction, which presents the study's general framework, the academic rationale for examining affective communication, and its main objectives, the second section reviews the relevant literature on affective intelligence theory, the role of emotions in political discourse, and the specific characteristics of political communication. The third section details the methodological design, the corpus definition, and the

coding framework used for the discourse analysis. The fourth section presents the empirical analysis of the six presidential candidates, illustrating how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are articulated within their mobilisation strategies. The fifth section synthesises the findings and outlines the typologies of affective repertoires identified in the electoral competition. The sixth section presents the conclusions, the study's theoretical contributions.

2. Literature review

Research on political emotions has helped move beyond the assumption that rational information processing predominantly determines political behaviour. Affective Intelligence Theory shows that affective and cognitive processes are interdependent, with emotions shaping attention allocation, the evaluation of political situations, and decision-making (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000, pp. 1–4). Similarly, Nussbaum (2013, pp. 1–24) emphasises the cognitive and evaluative dimensions of emotions and notes that they may have collective objects, such as nations, institutions, social groups, or political projects. Emotion can thus be understood not merely as an individual response but also as a social and discursive phenomenon.

Moving beyond the traditional paradigm that rigidly opposed reason and emotion—often viewing emotions as factors that disrupt logical judgement—Affective Intelligence Theory, developed by George E. Marcus, W. Russell Neuman, and Michael MacKuen (2000), demonstrates that cognitive and affective processes operate in close interaction to help citizens navigate a complex political environment. According to this theory, two principal emotional systems in the human brain guide political behaviour. The Disposition System, driven by positive emotions such as enthusiasm, satisfaction, and pride, monitors familiar environments and routine actions. When candidates or political messages elicit enthusiasm, voters tend to operate on "autopilot", relying on established habits, pre-existing party identities, and decision-making shortcuts. In other words, positive affect reinforces established political loyalties. The Surveillance System, centred on alert-related emotions such as anxiety, fear, and unease, operates as a defensive mechanism. When a new, unexpected, or threatening political scenario emerges, the surveillance system interrupts automatic behaviours, such as routine voting based simply on habit. This anxiety redirects conscious attention to the surrounding environment, making citizens more receptive to new information, more attentive to evaluating alternatives, and more deliberate in managing electoral risks.

The literature indicates that emotions may perform distinct functions: fear is associated with threat and uncertainty, anger with the attribution of responsibility and confrontation, indignation with moral evaluation, and hope with orientation towards an alternative future and the possibility of change (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2013; Wodak, 2015).

The relationship between emotion and populism has become an important focus of recent research. Populist discourses frequently construct an opposition between "the people" and "the elite" through appeals to fear, anger, and resentment. In contrast, the "politics of fear" may symbolically delineate a "we" perceived as threatened by "others" (Mudde, 2004, pp. 541–543; Wodak, 2015, pp. 1–24). Nevertheless, emotionality is not exclusive to populist discourse. Widmann's (2021, pp. 163–181) analysis, based on a large corpus of political communication from three European countries, identifies differences between populist and mainstream parties primarily in the type and distribution of emotions employed, rather than in their mere presence.

Similarly, Hameleers et al. (2022) suggest that populist and establishment actors may employ fear and anger as competing mobilisation strategies.

Recent literature has also highlighted the need to include positive emotions in analyses of political communication. Bliuc et al. (2026), in a systematic review of research on populism and emotions, show that anger and fear occupy a central position in the existing literature, while emphasising the importance of devoting greater attention to hope and other positive emotions. This observation is relevant to the present study because electoral mobilisation involves not only constructing a threat or identifying an adversary, but also articulating a perspective on the future. From this perspective, fear, anger, and indignation may help construct the problem and assign responsibility, while hope may support projecting an alternative.

An important aspect of recent scholarship concerns the relationship between emotion and the communication environment. The development of digital platforms has transformed the conditions under which political messages are produced, distributed, and received, facilitating direct communication between leaders and the public, message personalisation, and the rapid circulation of emotionally charged content. Research on digital political communication indicates that emotional intensity, personalisation, and direct leader–supporter relationships are recurring features of populist online communication, while affective messages may generate high levels of interaction and engagement (Yilmaz et al., 2026; Hameleers et al., 2024). These findings suggest analysing emotion not only in terms of a message's content but also in relation to the communicative environment in which it circulates.

This perspective is particularly relevant to analysing the 2024 Romanian presidential election, which took place within a highly digitalised media ecosystem and against a geopolitical backdrop shaped by the war in Ukraine. Research on political communication in Central and Eastern Europe indicates that fear and anger may acquire heightened relevance during periods of crisis, becoming integrated into narratives concerning security, sovereignty, and national identity (Hloušek, Brusenbauch Meislová, & Havlík, 2024). In the Romanian case, recent research has identified several recurring fear narratives in electoral communication associated with the war, including scenarios involving conflict escalation, the deployment of Romanian troops to Ukraine, or Romania's direct involvement in the war (Sălcudean, 2026, pp. 213–227).

Accordingly, the existing literature provides a solid foundation for understanding emotion as a resource of political communication, but leaves room for a comparative analysis that examines negative and positive emotions simultaneously, as well as the relationships between them. In particular, an approach is needed that does not automatically associate emotional communication with populism or treat emotions in isolation. Instead, it investigates how they form discursive repertoires adapted to different political actors and contexts. In the Romanian case, this perspective is particularly relevant because the 2024 presidential election brought together issues of security, sovereignty, identity, institutional crisis, and geopolitical orientation within a highly digitalised communication environment.

3. Research Design and Methodology

To examine how emotions are constructed and deployed in Romanian electoral communication, the study adopts a qualitative research design. The qualitative component focuses on the meanings, frames, and discursive relationships through which emotions are constructed (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2018).

The analytical strategy is deductive–inductive. The central emotional categories—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—are established deductively, based on the specialised literature on political emotions and electoral communication. At the same time, the subcategories and contextual codes are developed inductively following an examination of the corpus.

The empirical case is the campaign for the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election, with the period under analysis spanning 25 October–23 November 2024. This temporal delimitation makes it possible to compare messages produced within a common electoral context and under the same institutional and temporal constraints. The analysis is limited to the first round to maintain comparability among candidates, as the competition's configuration and the function of electoral discourse changed substantially after the first round.

The campaign context is relevant for interpreting emotional appeals, as the electoral competition unfolded against the backdrop of issues such as the war in Ukraine, national security, relations with NATO and the European Union, national sovereignty, corruption, and distrust in institutions. Within this context, six candidates were selected: Călin Georgescu, George Simion, Elena Lasconi, Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă, and Mircea Geoană. The selection seeks to capture variation in political positioning, relationships with the establishment, and forms of claimed legitimacy, without assuming that these actors can be reduced to perfectly homogeneous ideological categories. The value of the comparison lies precisely in the diversity of their political legitimisation repertoires.

The corpus comprises the public communication produced by the six candidates during the period under analysis: public posts on Facebook and X/Twitter, campaign speeches and statements, electoral appearances, video messages published through official channels, and electoral materials published on the candidates' official websites or on the official websites of the political organisations associated with them.

Table 1 Structure of the Analytical Corpus: Political Programmes and Electoral Interventions Analysed (25 October–23 November 2024)

Candidate	Political Programme / National Project	Electoral Interventions Analysed (Collected During the Campaign Period)
Călin Georgescu	Food, Water, Energy – A National Project *(Georgescu, 2024)*	Statements concerning financial support provided to Ukrainian children *(TikTok, 5 Nov. 2024a)* Statements concerning George Simion's candidacy and his relationship with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) *(Facebook, 18 Nov. 2024b)* Interview on peace, sovereignty, and foreign policy *(TVR Info, Nov. 2024c)* Press statements and campaign messages concerning the national economy *(Mediafax, Nov. 2024d)*
George Simion	Simion Plan for România *(Simion, 2024)*	Interview on the diaspora vote and prospects of qualifying for the second round *(News.ro, 20 Nov. 2024a)* Statements concerning administrative reform and reducing the number of party members *(Ziare.com, 21 Nov. 2024b)* Campaign speeches and statements concerning national resources *(AUR Platform / Simion, Nov. 2024c)*
Elena Lasconi	A Romania for Everyone, Not Just for Some! *(Lasconi, 2024)*	Press statements concerning political support and the absence of "backroom deals" *(News.ro, 3 Nov. 2024a)*

		Interview on defending European values and the rule of law *(Europa Liberă, 12 Nov. 2024b)* Debate programme on the fear of extremism and democratic reform *(Euronews România, Nov. 2024c)*
Marcel Ciolacu	The Safe Path for Romania *(Ciolacu, 2024)*	Speech delivered at the London Economic Forum on the diaspora and the labour market *(News.ro, 13 Nov. 2024a)* Official meeting and statements alongside NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte *(PSD, 18 Nov. 2024b)* Press statements on economic stability and pensions *(AGERPRES, Nov. 2024c)*
Nicolae Ciucă	A Prosperous and Secure Romania *(Ciucă, 2024)*	Critical statements concerning political partners – the parable of the Temple *(Financial Intelligence, 15 Nov. 2024a)* Interview on rejecting the nomination of a PSD or AUR prime minister *(News.ro, 19 Nov. 2024b)* Televised interview on campaign attacks and voter mobilisation *(Antena 3 CNN, Nov. 2024c)*
Mircea Geoană	My Commitment to Romania – Real Change *(Geoană, 2024)*	Statements concerning confidence in qualifying and the profile of the independent candidate *(Ziarul de Investigații, 8 Nov. 2024a)* Press conference on regional security and the Republic of Moldova *(Privesc.Eu, 20 Nov. 2024b)* Press statements on technocratic competence and campaign attacks *(AGERPRES, Oct.–Nov. 2024c)*

Source: author's design

The selected materials were included because they represent direct campaign communication produced or disseminated by the candidates during the defined electoral period and address issues relevant to the campaign agenda. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on the discursive construction of emotions within the selected corpus. It does not claim to measure the overall frequency of emotional appeals across the entirety of campaign communication.

The analysis begins with four main emotional categories: fear, anger, indignation, and hope, a conceptual framework grounded in political psychology and affective theory (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000). Fear is identified through the construction of threats, dangers, losses, or situations of insecurity, including references to war, violence, economic or social collapse, the loss of sovereignty, and a dangerous future (Altheide, 2002). Anger is associated with expressing or stimulating revolt, resentment, confrontation, or explicit rejection of an adversary, and it differs from mere political criticism by its strong affective charge (Valentino et al., 2011). Indignation is coded when a message formulates a negative moral evaluation by referring to injustice, abuse, betrayal, or the violation of values (Haidt, 2012). Hope, by contrast, is associated with constructing a positive future and the possibility of change, reconstruction, prosperity, unity (Just et al., 2007).

To move beyond an analysis limited to the frequency of emotions, each emotional appeal is contextualised with reference to the object of the emotion, the discursive frame, and the communicative function. The analysis therefore examines the targets towards which the emotion is directed—opponents, political parties, institutions, elites, external actors, social groups, or the political community itself—as well as the frames within which it is constructed, such as security,

crisis, corruption, injustice, sovereignty, national identity, the economy, war, democracy, Europe, anti-establishment discourse, or change. At the same time, the analysis is conducted.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis that follows goes beyond identifying individual emotional expressions and examines how emotions combine into recurring discursive configurations. Accordingly, the objective is not to determine which candidate used a particular emotion more frequently, but to identify how emotions were associated with political objects, interpretative frames, and communicative functions. The present analysis is predominantly qualitative, focusing on how emotions are discursively constructed, related to one another, and integrated into the candidates' narrative and ideological frameworks. Consequently, the frequencies and thematic distributions drawn from quantitative analytical reports, particularly those provided by the Association Pro Democracy (APD, 2024), do not form the basis for the classification proposed here; rather, they contextualise and provide empirical support for the observations emerging from the discourse analysis. In other words, quantitative data are used as an element of triangulation: they make it possible to assess the convergence between the qualitative interpretation of affective repertoires and the distribution of particular themes in the corpora analysed by secondary sources.

To ensure the rigour and reproducibility of the qualitative discourse analysis, the data were processed using a structured deductive–inductive coding framework. The primary coding categories were established based on the literature on affective intelligence and crisis communication (Marcus et al., 2000; Wodak, 2015), while the lexical and functional subcategories were derived inductively from the analysed corpus.

Table 2. Qualitative Coding Framework for Affective Repertoires in Electoral Discourse

Emotional category	Discursive indicators (keywords & metaphors)	Emotion's object (target)	Primary discursive function
Fear	War, crisis, collapse, loss of sovereignty, threat, instability, siege	External actors, war, economic instability, loss of identity	Reframing security as an existential crisis; legitimising the need for protection
Anger	Revolt, confrontation, betrayal, struggle, dismantling, scoundrels	Traditional parties, the "system", political elites, the establishment	Polarisation, mobilisation against the opponent, delegitimisation of the political class
Indignation	Corruption, injustice, abuse, theft, lack of dignity, privileges, backroom deals	Corrupt elites, abuses of power, institutional incompetence	Moral evaluation of political conflict; normative demand for integrity and justice
Hope	Renewal, peace, reconstruction, change, future, development, competence	The national community, young people, the national project, democratic reforms	Optimistic projection of the future; offering a solution/alternative to the crisis

Source: Author's design (Brader, 2006; Marcus et al., 2000; Wodak, 2015), based on the preliminary analysis applied to the corpus of speeches and political programmes (Ciolacu,

2024a, 2024b; Ciucă, 2024a, 2024b; Geoană, 2024a, 2024b; Georgescu, 2024a, 2024b; Lasconi, 2024a, 2024b; Simion, 2024a, 2024b).

The analytical corpus was examined at the level of discrete discursive units in which one or more of the four target emotions—fear, anger, indignation, and hope—were explicitly expressed or discursively constructed. Each relevant unit was coded according to five dimensions: (1) the dominant emotion; (2) the linguistic or rhetorical indicators through which it was constructed; (3) its object or target; (4) the contextual frame in which it occurred; and (5) its communicative function. The coding was then compared across candidates to identify recurring emotional configurations rather than isolated instances of emotional language.

4.1. Călin Georgescu

In Călin Georgescu's case, fear occurs frequently and centres on external threats and the possibility of Romania becoming involved in a conflict that does not belong to it. At the same time, anger, also highly prominent, is directed toward the political class and the "system". Indignation extends this construction to the loss of sovereignty, dignity, and decision-making capacity, while hope, likewise prominent, proposes restoring control through economic autonomy, peace, and national renewal (TVR Info, November 2024; Mediafax, November 2024). This observation is supported by the APD (2024) analysis, in which the term "system" emerges as a major axis of electoral discourse, associated in Georgescu's case with change and with the relationship between the global system and the national state. APD also indicates that the terms "sovereign/sovereigntism" account for approximately 5% of the analysed semantic field and are attributed entirely to Georgescu, being correlated with his political and economic programme. Furthermore, on Europe and European values, Georgescu accounts for 14% of coverage of this theme, with the report highlighting, in his case, the cleavage between the European/global system and the national state. The dominant affective configuration can therefore be summarised as Fear → Indignation → Restoration of Control → Hope, within a framework centred on loss, sovereignty, and the recovery of an order perceived as having been lost.

4.2. George Simion

In George Simion's case, fear is highly prominent. It is associated with the risk of losing sovereignty and resources, while anger, also highly prominent, intensifies opposition to adversaries through a confrontational and polarising register. Indignation, likewise highly prominent, attributes responsibility for social and economic difficulties to the political class, while hope transforms dissatisfaction into a promise of renewal and collective mobilisation (Simion, November 2024). This articulation converges with the APD data, which identify "system vs anti-system" as one of the dominant axes of electoral discourse and explicitly associate Simion's case with the notion of the "victim of the system". The report also shows that the notion of "change" is concentrated primarily around Călin Georgescu, George Simion, and Elena Lasconi, with the three accounting collectively for 69% of this component. In the analysis of corruption, which accounts for approximately 8% of the electoral discourse examined, Simion accounts for 6% of references to this theme, including references associated with the expression "national plunder". Accordingly, the dominant configuration, Indignation → Anger → Mobilisation → Hope, highlights the transformation of negative emotions into a resource for political mobilisation.

4.3. Elena Lasconi

In Elena Lasconi's discourse, fear is highly prominent and is constructed through the personification of internal and external threats, such as extremism, geopolitical insecurity, and the risk of democratic backsliding. Anger is moderate and appears primarily as an emotion to be controlled and redirected. In contrast, indignation is highly prominent and focuses on corruption, governance, and everyday problems tied to the cost of living. Hope, likewise highly prominent, functions as a response to these sources of dissatisfaction and is linked to institutional reform, transparency, and democratic values (Euronews România, November 2024). The APD data provide a relevant quantitative reference: corruption accounts for approximately 8% of the discourse analysed. In comparison, Lasconi accounts for 59% of references to this theme, in correlation with terms related to justice and with the system/anti-system variable. At the same time, Lasconi accounts for 31% of the coverage of the theme "Europe and European values", the highest proportion among the candidates analysed by APD. In comparison, Nicolae Ciucă accounts for 22%, Călin Georgescu for 14%, Mircea Geoană for 11%, and Marcel Ciolacu for 9%. These data align with the qualitative observation of indignation around institutional integrity and its transformation into reform-oriented hope. The dominant configuration is therefore Indignation → Reform → Hope, against a backdrop of fear employed to mark democratic and geopolitical risks.

4.4. Marcel Ciolacu

In Marcel Ciolacu's case, fear is moderate and primarily warns against risks associated with political and economic instability. Anger is low to moderate and is used mainly to reject opponents' confrontational discourse. At the same time, indignation is moderate to high and focuses on arrogance, a lack of empathy, and politicians' detachment from citizens' concerns. Hope is highly prominent and is constructed through references to stability, economic performance, and the continuity of development (AGERPRES, November 2024). This orientation is consistent with the APD observation that the term "system", which is highly frequent in electoral discourse, acquires meanings such as stability, continuity, and predictability in the cases of Ciolacu and Nicolae Ciucă, in contrast to the meaning of change associated primarily with Georgescu, Simion, and Lasconi. APD also reports that Ciolacu accounts for 9% of the coverage of the theme "Europe and European values". In this case, the quantitative data do not directly measure emotional intensity but provide a reference point for contextualising the discourse's orientation towards stability and continuity. The dominant configuration can therefore be summarised as Fear → Stability → Hope, in which the proposal of predictability and continuity follows the negative emotion as a solution.

4.5. Nicolae Ciucă

In Nicolae Ciucă's discourse, fear is low and is primarily associated with geopolitical threats, manipulation, and information warfare, being counterbalanced by a rhetoric of resilience and security. Anger is moderate and assumes a function of combative mobilisation. At the same time, indignation is highly prominent and is constructed around the idea of an unfair campaign and attacks directed against the candidate and his party. Hope is highly prominent and is associated with security, responsibility, and the projection of a stable and prosperous Romania (Antena 3

CNN, November 2024). APD data support this orientation: in the system/anti-system analysis, Ciucă, together with Ciolacu, is associated with meanings such as stability, continuity, and predictability, while in the theme "Europe and European values" he accounts for 22% of coverage. Regarding the theme "NATO, peace and war", APD reports 12% of the coverage for Ciucă, while Mircea Geoană accounts for 33%, Elena Lasconi for 24%, and Călin Georgescu for 10%. Accordingly, the configuration Fear/Security → Responsibility → Hope highlights an affective structure in which threat is converted into an appeal for protection, discipline, and stability.

4.6. Mircea Geoană

In Mircea Geoană's case, fear is moderate and constructed by emphasising Romania's vulnerability in an unstable international context. At the same time, anger is moderate to high and directed towards the party system and practices of political patronage. Indignation is highly prominent and is activated by the attacks and alleged attempts at discrediting invoked by the candidate. At the same time, hope is highly prominent and proposes competence, professionalisation, and institutional modernisation as an alternative (AGERPRES, October–November 2024). The APD data are particularly relevant to the security component: within the theme "NATO, peace and war", Geoană accounts for 33% of the coverage, followed by Lasconi with 24%, Ciucă with 12%, and Georgescu with 10%; the report also states that Geoană is the candidate who addresses most extensively the geostrategic and political dimension of Romania's relationship with NATO. On corruption, Geoană accounts for 15% of references to this theme, while on "Europe and European values" he accounts for 11% of the coverage. These quantitative reference points converge with the qualitative observation that negative emotions are converted into a promise of competence and modernisation. The dominant configuration is therefore Vulnerability/Fear → Indignation → Competence → Hope, within an affective register oriented towards professionalisation, security, and institutional reform.

5. Discussions

The comparative analysis reveals that fear, anger, indignation, and hope do not occur with the same intensity, nor do they perform identical functions across the six candidates. Instead, they form distinct emotional configurations shaped by the object of the emotion, its target, and its communicative function. Fear primarily generates a perception of threat and vulnerability; anger and indignation assign responsibility and confer moral meaning upon the problems identified; while hope projects a desirable future or a political alternative. Accordingly, the differences identified lie not merely in the presence or absence of particular emotions, but in how the four emotional resources combine within broader discursive repertoires. Within the comparative analysis, political positioning is operationalised through the discursive characteristics identified in the corpus, including the construction of political antagonism, the representation of institutions and elites, the framing of threats, and the proposed relationship between political change and institutional continuity.

Table 3 Comparative Synthesis of Candidates' Affective Repertoires, Causal Sequences, and Mobilising Functions in the 2024 Presidential Election

Candidate	Type of Emotion	Quote from Speech /	Frequency	The Function of Emotion in Political Communication	Dominant Emotional Configuration

		Intervention & APA Citation			
Călin Georgescu	**Fear**	"We cannot be dragged into a war that is not ours. Peace is the only option for the survival of our nation." *(TVR Info, November 2024)*	High	Constructing an external threat and activating fear of involvement in a foreign military conflict to position the candidacy as a guarantee of peace.	**Fear → Indignation → Hope** Sovereigntist-populist register structured around national loss versus national recovery.
	Anger	"The so-called political class has sold everything, brought the country to its knees, and served foreign interests rather than those of Romanians!" *(TikTok statement / Mediafax, November 2024)*	High	The channelling of anti-system revolt and the direct attack on political elites accused of betraying the national interest.	
	Indignation	"Romania has become a colony on the margins of Europe, treated without respect and deprived of the ability to make its own decisions." *(TVR Info, November 2024)*	High	The denunciation of a national injustice and the activation of resentment towards the country's external status.	
	Hope	"Food, water, energy—we have everything we need. Romania can become independent and prosperous through its own efforts." *(Mediafax, November 2024)*	High	The projection of a sovereigntist future, based on economic self-sufficiency, dignity, and national renewal.	
George Simion	**Fear**	"If they remain in power, we will definitively lose the scant resources and sovereignty we still have left."	High	Generating a sense of urgency and danger regarding the continuity of the current government.	**Indignation → Anger → Mobilisation → Hope** Anti-system register oriented

		(Simion, November 2024)			towards civic mobilisation and political change.
	Anger	"They are lazy, they are cowardly, unprepared… They are Ursula von der Leyen's lackeys." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	The Manichaean polarisation of discourse ("us" vs. "them") and the delegitimisation of opponents through personal attacks and labelling.	
	Indignation	"Corrupt politicians have turned Romania's counties into symbols of poverty and depopulation." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	Identifying those responsible for the socio-economic crisis and justifying their removal.	
	Hope	"I firmly believe that Romania can rise again! We must nurture this hope among Romanians." *(Simion, November 2024)*	High	Mobilising the electorate through the promise of collective action, pragmatic change, and restoring power to citizens.	
Elena Lasconi	**Fear**	"A student fears the victory of extremists, while a pensioner does not want to wake up to the Russian army at the border." *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	High	Personification of threats (domestic extremism and external geopolitical danger) to mobilise the pro-European tactical vote.	**Indignation → Reform → Hope** Reformist-institutional register oriented towards defending democracy and transparency.
	Anger	"We must not allow anger to drag us back into the past. Let us transform our anger into hope!" *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	Moderate	The appropriation and redirection of popular anger away from occultist or far-left/far-right reactions towards the construction of a democratic alternative.	
	Indignation	"The vote is a vote against this government, which has treated Romanians with contempt, with arrogance, high prices, and taxes."	High	The moral and political sanctioning of the PSD–PNL coalition by invoking its negative impact on everyday life.	

		(Euronews România, November 2024)			
	Hope	"Hope is what moves us forward. Romania has unlimited potential for a clean democracy." *(Euronews România, November 2024)*	High	The projection of an optimistic vision, grounded in democratic values, institutional reform, and transparency.	
Marcel Ciolacu	**Fear**	"Political adventures and populist experiments could plunge Romania into economic instability and isolation." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate	Invoking the risk of instability to discourage protest voting and promote predictability.	**Fear → Stability → Hope** Register centred on continuity, predictability, and governing capacity.
	Anger	"Dirty attacks and political scandals only serve to divide the population; we need balance, not a circus." *(AGERPRES / Campaign speech, November 2024)*	Low–Moderate	Discrediting the opposition's aggressive discourse and positioning the PSD as a mature, construction-oriented political force.	
	Indignation	"The arrogance and lack of empathy displayed by some politicians have alienated people from the state; this must stop." *(Ciolacu / AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate–High	Criticising previous styles of governance in order to reposition the party within a framework centred on protecting ordinary citizens.	
	Hope	"We have succeeded in bringing stability, increasing pensions and incomes, and we can continue the country's development."	High	Anchoring hope in concrete achievements, arguing that continuity guarantees prosperity.	

		(AGERPRES, November 2024)			
Nicolae Ciucă	**Fear**	"Everything was an attack against us involving smear tactics, manipulation, and deception, but I am not afraid." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	Low	Denouncing the hybrid warfare/disinformation campaign and projecting the profile of a resilient military leader.	**Fear / Security → Responsibility → Hope** Register oriented towards security, responsibility, and continuity.
	Anger	"Let us fight, good people! This is the moment of truth, and we must stop the capture of the state." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	Moderate	Mobilising his own electorate through combative, military-inspired rhetoric during the final phase of the campaign.	
	Indignation	"We are experiencing a dirty campaign orchestrated against the PNL by those who fear a stable Romania." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	High	Invoking the status of an unfairly targeted victim of political attacks to consolidate the right-wing electorate.	
	Hope	"We must inspire confidence, commitment, and responsibility for a secure and prosperous Romania." *(Antena 3 CNN, November 2024)*	High	Associating the candidacy with national security, institutional predictability, and duty towards the country.	
Mircea Geoană	**Fear**	"Without professional leadership at Cotroceni, Romania risks remaining vulnerable in an increasingly dangerous international context." *(AGERPRES, October 2024)*	Moderate	Activating concern about national security and the parties' lack of preparedness for external crises.	**Vulnerability / Fear → Competence → Hope** Register centred on modernisation, technocracy, security, and professional governance.

	Anger	"The current party system is entrenched in political patronage and competition for resources, while ignoring the genuine interests of citizens." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	Moderate-High	Attacking traditional parties (PSD–PNL) to attract dissatisfied voters.	
	Indignation	"It is unacceptable that I have been subjected to such a level of dirty attacks and attempts to discredit me and my family." *(AGERPRES, November 2024)*	High	Framing reputational attacks as evidence of the "system's fear" of an independent and competent candidacy.	
	Hope	"I propose a commitment to Romania based on competence, concrete projects, and institutional modernisation." *(AGERPRES, October 2024)*	High	The projection of a technocratic model of governance, oriented towards pragmatic solutions and development.	

Source: author's design

Based on how fear, anger, indignation, and hope are connected to political objectives and the attribution of responsibility, three main typologies of affective repertoires can be identified:

1. The sovereigntist-populist repertoire (Călin Georgescu, George Simion)

This repertoire is based on an emotional structure of rupture directed against the political establishment. The discursive mechanism begins with the activation of fear, associated with geopolitical risks, the loss of sovereignty, or socio-economic decline, alongside anger and indignation directed towards a "system" perceived as oppressive, corrupt, or incapable of representing citizens' interests. On this basis, a discursive dichotomy is constructed between "the people" and "the elites/system", facilitating the attribution of responsibility and intensifying dissatisfaction. The affective conversion from a state of alert to mobilisation takes place through hope, which is configured differently in the two cases: for Călin Georgescu, it is associated with "national renewal", peace, sovereignty, and the recovery of autonomy, whereas for George Simion it is articulated through collective action, courage, and pragmatic change.

2. The reformist-institutional repertoire (Elena Lasconi, Mircea Geoană)

This repertoire is characteristic of actors who advocate change from within the democratic framework or through expertise and institutional professionalisation. Its affective core

is moral indignation at corruption, stagnation, and administrative incapacity. At the same time, fear is activated secondarily, not so much by evoking an immediate military threat as by constructing the risk of democratic backsliding, the erosion of the rule of law, or geopolitical isolation. Affective conversion occurs by transforming negative emotions into arguments for reform. In Elena Lasconi's case, hope is projected predominantly through an ethical and democratic register, by constructing an image of Romania associated with transparency, institutional integrity, and European values. In Mircea Geoană's case, by contrast, hope is articulated in a more technocratic register, through competence, administrative modernisation, concrete projects, and development, although during the electoral campaign Mircea Geoană was associated with party structures given his political trajectory.

3. The stability-and-continuity repertoire (Marcel Ciolacu, Nicolae Ciucă)

This repertoire is characteristic of candidates associated with mainstream parties and governmental experience. The discursive mechanism involves de-escalating and institutionalising fear, presenting it primarily as an external reality that must be managed responsibly, whether as regional security risks or economic and political instability. Within this framework, anger and indignation occupy a secondary position, being reduced in intensity or redirected towards norms of responsibility, order, and the protection of the institutional framework. Affective conversion does not occur through the promise of rupture but through the projection of hope in the form of predictable continuity, associated with economic development, investment, institutional stability, and national security. In Marcel Ciolacu's case, this logic is expressed primarily through the promise of economic continuity and stability. In contrast, in Nicolae Ciucă's case it is articulated more strongly around security, responsibility, and Euro-Atlantic alignment.

The three discursive repertoires were derived inductively by comparing the emotional configurations coded for the six candidates. The classification accounts for dominant emotional patterns, their recurring objects and targets, and their associated communicative functions. Accordingly, these categories should be understood as analytical constructions emerging from the corpus rather than as fixed, exhaustive, or definitive classifications of the candidates' political identities. The repertoires therefore describe recurring modes of discursively organising affect as observed in the analysed corpus, without assuming that each candidate's discourse can be reduced entirely to one configuration.

6. Conclusions

The present study has examined how fear, anger, indignation, and hope were constructed and deployed as discursive resources for electoral mobilisation during the campaign for the first round of the 2024 Romanian presidential election. Moving beyond approaches that reduce political emotion to mere rhetorical manipulation or treat it as an exclusive feature of populist discourse, the research has demonstrated that affect fulfils a structural function in the organisation of political discourse.

In response to the first research question, the analysis shows that Romanian political actors use emotions to impose a temporal and causal order on reality. Electoral discourse operates through the affective sequencing of the message: the identification of a threat or vulnerability (fear), the attribution of responsibility and the formulation of an ethical evaluation (anger/indignation), followed by the provision of a way out of the crisis through orientation towards

a desirable future (hope). Hope thus emerges not as an isolated element but as a necessary condition for the discursive closure of any mobilising discourse.

Regarding the second research question, the differences between the candidates' affective repertoires do not derive from the presence or absence of emotions, but from the semantic and functional matrix within which they are integrated. Populist/anti-system candidates use fear and anger to construct antagonism and delegitimise the political system; reformist candidates direct indignation toward overcoming institutional dysfunction and corruption; while candidates representing mainstream parties use fear of instability to legitimise institutional order, continuity, and the state's administrative capacity.

The article's theoretical contribution lies in conceptualising emotions as complex discursive repertoires and in highlighting the essential role of positive emotions—particularly hope—in complementing negative emotions within electoral strategies.

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