Narratives urging citizens not to vote in Romanian elections

On the eve of the election rounds, some of Romania’s fringe websites, blogs and individual podcasters are promoting the non-participation of citizens in the voting process. Their message directed at the entire political class has the allure of being non-partisan, but a closer examination can reveal the agenda of those issuing them.

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Political freedom means being able to express a voting option according to personal convictions, without constrains. A citizen living in a democratic country also has the freedom not to make any choice, if he or she feels that no political option is suitable. That non-voter has the right to publicly express this opinion, so that others may follow suit. While the call not to vote falls within the limits of freedom of expression guaranteed by liberal democracies, the purpose of this call may be beyond legitimate intentions.

Messages calling for a boycott of voting is usually negatively charged, if not always, claiming that voting itself is against the interests of citizens and only serves politicians. An analysis of the impact of these messages on the voting public is difficult to undertake from a methodological perspective. The political science researcher would hardly be able to identify those voters who allowed themselves to be convinced to give up casting their ballot because of the anti-vote messages that they were bombarded with during the election campaign.

Political scientists and communication experts have the right tools when it comes to online conspiracy theories meant to generate a low voter turnout in elections. An analysis of the messages that incite to vote boycott provides answers about the audiences receptive to this rhetoric and highlights conclusions about how citizens can avoid falling prey to this message that undermines the legitimacy of representative democracy.