

Mobilization and Media Framing of the Youth-led Protests during the 2024 Presidential Elections Crisis in Romania

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Abstract:

Following the first round of the 2024 presidential elections in Romania, youth-led protests emerged as a powerful form of civic expression, underscoring the growing influence of young people in shaping contemporary political discourse. Simultaneously, Romanian mass media acted as the main forum where the meaning and legitimacy of these mobilizations were thoroughly negotiated. Drawing on Robert Entman's conceptualization of framing, this article examines how Romanian online media represented the youth protests between November 25 and December 6, 2024, and considers the implications of these portrayals for the public perception of unconventional political participation. Methodologically, the study combines content and discourse analysis of 24 online news articles published by six outlets, namely Hotnews.ro, G4Media.ro, Digi24.ro, R3Media.ro, ActiveNews.ro, and Capital.ro, in order to identify recurring frames, dominant narratives, and patterns of representation. The findings reveal that mainstream outlets predominantly framed the protests as peaceful and legitimate, emphasizing young people's civic engagement and political awareness, whereas ideologically-driven outlets depicted the protesters and their actions as disruptive, illegitimate and externally influenced. Neutral coverage generally adopted a more objective, fact-based approach, while still reinforcing the credibility and political significance of the mobilizations. Overall, the study demonstrates that media framing plays a crucial role in shaping how youth protests are evaluated, with legitimizing frames serving as essential instruments for recognizing the political agency of young people and reinforcing civic resilience in an increasingly polarized and fragile democratic environment.

Keywords: youth protests; media framing; elections; Romania