GOOD FAITH BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE: THE POPULIST LEADER IN HIS EGOCENTRIC NETWORK

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Abstract: *In this paper we propose a fresh perspective for analysing an ever-strong phenomenon, that of the populist leader. The populist leader is the candidate that discursively positions himself as the representative of the good 'people' against the established and corrupted elite. But how pure is the populist leader himself, does the moral discourse match his actual social network? The object of study is the populist leader in his egocentric network and we study it from the perspective of a juridical concept, that of bona fides. In order to analyse the good faith of the populist leader in his egocentric network, we designed a methodological tool inspired by sociometry, a matrix that allows us to observe the coherence between the ego and the alters in the egocentric network of the candidate. Two main dimensions of bona fides are, since Cicero's time, the honesty of words, and the integrity of action. These two dimensions are operationalised in our simple matrix, and the populist leader that feeds the matrix is Călin Georgescu, a meteoric candidate in the Romanian presidential elections, that emerged unexpectedly and won more than twenty percent of votes in the 2024 presidential elections. The result of the analysis shows incoherence between what the leader says about people in his egocentric network, and how the alters in the egocentric network position themselves toward the populist leader. We believe that our conceptual and methodological approach is scalable, and be put to testing whether a populist leader can ever be of good faith.*

Keywords: *populist leader; bona fides; good faith; sociometry; egocentric network.*

Who is the populist leader?

In the literature, the populist leader is the candidate that discursively positions himself as the representative of the 'people' against the established and corrupted elite (Mudde; Muller). The populist leader gains sympathy by means of the opposition between the pure people, and the corrupted elite. But how pure is the populist leader himself within his egocentric network, does his moral discourse match his actual actions within his social network? It is something that we explore in our research. In order to understand this issue, we examine who the people of the populist leader are in the concrete terms of his social network.

Călin Georgescu is a Romanian citizen that became a presidential candidate with no prior notable political experience or credentials. Before the presidential campaign he was unknown to mainstream media. He moved from nothing to more than twenty percent of votes in the first round of the Romanian presidential elections in late 2024.

> In the early hours of November 25th, Romania witnessed a political upheaval that left the public and political analysts alike stunned. For the first time in the country's modern history, an independent far-right candidate emerged victorious in the presidential elections. With polling predictions placing him at a mere 6% and exit polls estimating 14% to 16%, his final tally of more than 20%—representing over 2 million votes – was a shock to the political establishment (Trifan 221).

Consequently, "the fallout was predictably chaotic. Allegations of Russian interference? Check. Annulment of the first round of voting? Of course. A political system scrambling to make sense of itself? Absolutely" as Baghiu (236) plastically captures the moment. These elections were eventually annulled by the Constitutional Court of Romania on grounds of severe breaching of democratic principles. The candidate declared zero expenses in his electoral campaign, something quite unheard of, and that turned out not to be accurate at all[1]. The subject became widely discussed and analysed, but more in terms of the foreign interference in the Romanian elections or the populist leaning of the Romanian population, but not really by looking at the good faith of the candidate himself.

On *bona fides*

"The active sense of *fides* designated the action of reposing confidence in, or giving credit to someone, in the sense of believing that he will act in accordance with his social status" (Valsan 56). This was the case in Roman times, but does it make sense today, in the context of populist politics and the populist leader? *Bona fides*, good faith, is a respectable concept that is of great help within the juridical worlds because it clarifies and helps settle the relation between two or multiple partners in civil exchanges. The classical principles of the honesty of words, and integrity of action represent the main lines of evaluation of good faith when tension or breaches of contract arise. The term is to be found in all the jurisdictions inspired by the Roman law, basically all over the world.

> The noun *fides* derive from the adjective *fidus* meaning trustworthy, reliable (…) The etymological studies of *fides* suggest that, originally, this notion referred to relations of inequality, in which the party with a lower standing reposed confidence in another, of higher rank, with the expectation or certitude of receiving a benefit in return" (Valsan 55).

Currently, while it is widely integrated in the judiciary procedures when it comes to the civil law, the commercial law and the diversity within, from real estate deals, to trade of all sorts, it is much less common to think of

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[1]https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Documente%20CSAT/Document%20CSAT%20SRI%20I.pdf

this concept when it comes to the political realm. Nevertheless, in the Roman world, we find it binding for members of the political, too: "the duty to protect the citizens and the state (*fides senatus*) demanded the senators' loyalty to their public commitments and fairness in debates and decision making" (Valsan 50).

In the Romanian Civil Code, Article 14 defines good faith as a psychological state of the subject of the law characterised by fair intention, the effort to act with care, the certainty that the juridical documents are legal, as well as the sincerity, probity, and integrity of the subject. Moreover, these aspects imply as well refraining from producing a prejudice in the execution of obligations. Last but not least, the subject is presumed to be of good faith unless proven otherwise.

At the European level, Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights address the people that express publicly, as they ought to guarantee that they do it in the public interest, with good faith, without producing disinformation of defamation. According to Article 10 and the Court, freedom of speech is a practice that needs to be of good faith, as it measures the relation between the freedom of expression, and the responsibility of the person or institution that exercises the right. Consequently, politicians can be considered as objects of this principle by virtue of the fact that by the nature of their occupation they express publicly.

Currently, while the concept of *bona fides* is very much consecrated in the palpable world of contract based human interaction, it is not equally so in the political realm. Good faith is more a moral expectation towards a political representative, than a civil binding proposition in the law. More often than not, it seems that politicians can freely promise, but not necessarily deliver. At the same time, what seems obvious at the level of common sense needs to be demonstrated in the scientific realm.

Bona fides in sociometric terms

The methodological novelty of our approach is borrowing the *bona fides* concept from the law, and putting it to fair use in the realm of the social sciences, and more specifically in a social network analysis. The main consideration is that if the concept has proven its utility for two millennia in making clear and restoring contract-based relations, it can as well serve well in clarifying relations in other realms of human interaction. The staying virtue of the concept is that it makes measurable the coherence between two parts of a social relation. Moreover, the accountability that it brings to the parts involved sets light on the continuum of intention, wording, and action. The core principle is fundamentally the same, human and relational. Therefore, in this research we pivot the concept of *bona fides* to a sociometrical analysis, while keeping the main dimensions as the main explanatory axes. At the same

time, while *bona fides* is called to restore the understanding between contractual parts in the juridical worlds, we use it to make sense of the coherence of a political leader, in the relation between the political candidate and his closed ones, the people that are in his closest proximity of discourse and/or action.

The unit of analysis is the ego-network/egocentric network (Mitchell); the network centred on a single individual that includes the *ego* itself as well as the ego's direct connections called the *alters*. In this case the ego is the populist presidential candidate, and alters are the people that are close and gravitate around Călin Georgescu.

The main methodological inspiration for developing our simple matrix is classical sociometry, the one from the time of Moreno (1951), and before maths taking over (Wasserman & Faust). Sociometry is a branch of social analysis that finds its origins in the first decades of the twentieth century. The basic proposition of that novel approach was that social relations can be measured, basically by means of operationalising attractions and rejections within a social network. The quantification of social relations was not something common in a time when the narrative approaches to relationships, mainly literary, were the norm and the common sense. In the scientific realm, the natural sciences were leading the way by means of lab-based observations. At the same time, human structure and humans within have spontaneity, something that the natural world could not account for. It is the reason why Moreno expressed the need for developing a tool to reveal the deep social structure that could be put to sociological use. Thus, the introduction of measurements for the social was the idea of Jocob Moreno (1941), and it has made a fulminant career in the hyper-quantified world of mathematics lately. The sociogram is the main instrument used in sociometry to quantify relational aspects between individuals in a given social network. The terms sociometry and sociometer originate from the Latin term socius, which means 'social' and *metrum*, which refers to measurement, according to the popular encyclopaedia.

On the basic proposition of sociometry, there has developed the method of social network analysis (SNA). "Individuals are, as it were, tied to one another by invisible bonds which are knitted together into a criss-cross mesh of connections, much as a fishing net or a length of cloth is made from intertwined fabrics" (Scott 109). SNA has made quite a career in both the social sciences as well as in mathematics, as the consecrated method that allows for quantifying relations within and between groups. In our contribution, we go back to the basics of sociometry: "This perspective, centred on the image of the intertwining of social relations, offers not so much a specialised method as a formulation of the fundamental concepts of the sociological enterprise" (Scott 109). It is in this vein that we use the original

propositions of sociometry referring to the intertwining of social relations. We use the basic idea of measuring the social within the network, by incorporating attractions, indifference, and rejections between the leader and members of his social network in terms of the coherence, or lack of, between what he says about them, and what they say about him.

The sociometric tool for observing *bona fides*

In order to observe the good faith of the populist political candidate, we used the basic propositions of sociometry, while operationalising the good faith as the symmetry between the positioning of the populist leader towards significant alters, and the positioning of alters towards the leader. On the horizontal lines we proposed three values, namely -1, 0, and 1. Minus one represents declarations of the populist leader that dismiss a person from the social circle, where the person is either not considered as being part of the social circle in a public declaration, or the leader says that he does not know that person. Zero stands for neutral positions of the leader as to the people in the social network. One is the value assigned to positive declarations about a person from the populist political leader's social circle. In this way, we observe what the populist leader says and assign a value to it, from dismissal, neutrality, to symbolic embrace. The results from this table are corroborated with the positioning of the alters towards the populist leader, ultimately observing the sincerity of intention in the action or reciprocity/ or lack of.

In this research, statements of the populist leader have been documented and placed in the matrix, being assigned one of the three values. It is not an exhaustive list, but declarations made during the electoral campaign for the Romanian presidential elections of 2024, and from these, the ones that address specifically members of the egocentric network. The corpora are composed on the one hand of the egocentric network of the populist leader, and the declarations about the people closest to the populist leader. Ultimately, we verify the basic dimensions of the good faith, the sincerity of intention, the verity of words, and the consequential nature of actions by means of attractions and rejections. If the leader is of good faith, then there is reciprocity, if there is no coherence between the leader and the alters in the social network, then *bona fides* is missing. We should clarify the fact that we are not looking at what the candidate promises, and check whether he accomplishes the promises. We are looking at what he says about the people in his social network.

We formulated the research questions that guide our inquiry: What is the ego network of Călin Georgescu? Is what the populist leader saying about his alters overlapping with how the alters position themselves towards the leader? And the main research question: Is Călin Georgescu of good faith?

The initial exploratory hypotheses are: If what the populist candidate says about the people in his social network overlaps with the real social network, then Călin Georgescu is of good faith; and conversely, if what he says does not overlap with his social network, then the conditions for *bona fides* are not met.

The populist leader and his egocentric network

The degree of overlap of the real ego network of Călin Georgescu with his public narratives about people close to him represent the main objective of this research. We aim to observe whether the populist candidate respects the main *bona fides* principles, thus whether he is of good faith or not. This analysis aims to clarify the dynamics of attractions and rejections between Călin Georgescu and the members of his egocentric network. The relations will be interpreted according to the actions and public declarations, emphasising the real closeness or distance within the ego-network of Călin Georgescu.

Călin Georgescu has had a very diverse professional trajectory with more than twenty workplaces from the ninety nineties up to present time. Even though he presents himself as anti-system, he comes from the state system himself. He was employed by the Ministry of Environment in the late nineties, he was a director within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a human rights' rapporteur for the United Nations, a lecturer in a provincial university of Romania, as well as some other high-status and well-connected public positions. In these various professional contexts, the ego, Călin Georgescu, has met and networked with various alters through the family, the academic sphere, and the very diverse workplaces.

For this research, we selected the public iterations of the populist candidate where he is directly referencing the members of his egocentric network. These were selected from a large pool of public discourses, especially on television (Gândul TV, Realitatea Plus), as well as on the You Tube channel of Călin Georgescu. Moreover, we consulted secondary data, analyses published by media institutions, such as G4Media, Hotnews, and Europa Liberă (Free Europe). The already published analyses allowed us to place the affirmations of Georgescu in their social and political context.

Ego-network of Călin Georgescu
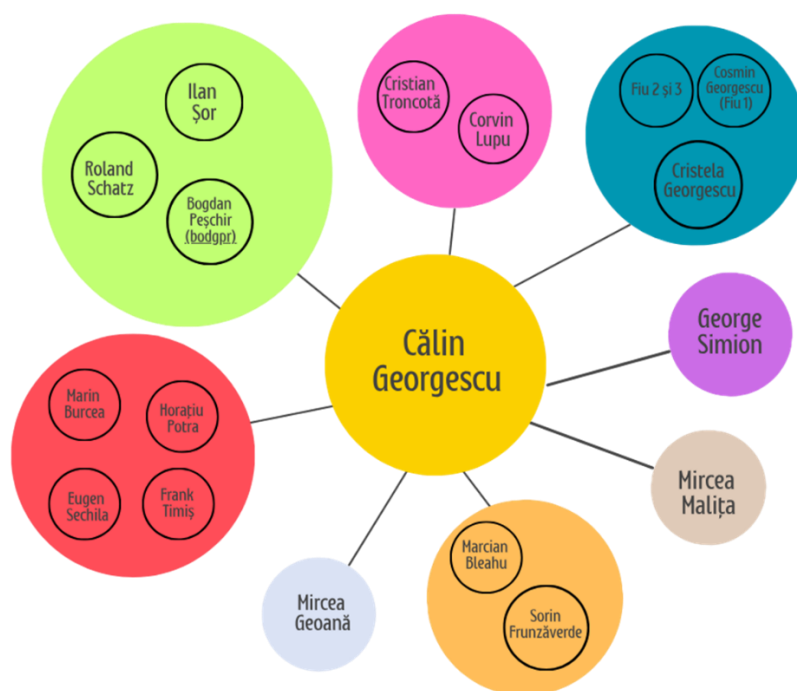
- **Turquoise** - family;
- **Green** – the 2024 electoral campaign team supporters
- **Purple** – the political partner in the electoral period
- **Pink** – people related to the secret services
- **Red** – the security team
- **Orange** – people from the Ministry of Environment, former employer
- **Light blue** – person from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former employer
- **Cream** – the one Călin Georgescu considers (unilaterally) as his mentor

The ego-network above is not exhaustive, but it does comprise social clusters people that have something to do with the political momentum of the populist candidate. Along his public path, he has occupied around fifteen positions within the state and private sectors, from which we selected the ones

related to his meteoric political career. In time, he has built numerous social relations that were to be relevant in his quality as political candidate.

The people identified as supporters of Călin Georgescu in the 2024 presidential electoral campaign have offered both significant financial support as well as a public arena to perform on. In the next section of the paper, we will present the people from the egocentric network of Călin Georgescu.

'All the president's men'

The first social cluster we analyse is that of the family. The wife of the populist candidate is a former banker in an American trust, Citibank, and currently a naturist healer. She has been a constant supporter of her husband during the electoral campaign and they had often appeared together in clips on You Tube and other platforms. There are as well two sons in this cluster, one of whom has consistently benefitted from public money for his private tennis club[2].

The colour red in the above graph is attributed to the security team of the populist candidate. Horațiu Potra features as the head of security of the populist leader being a former soldier of the French Legion. He was involved in issues as diverse as drugs, private delivery of military in Congo, threats to national security, and incitement to violence. Eugen Sechila is another member of the personal security unit of the populist candidate. He was active in an organisation with far-right sympathies[3]. During the electoral campaign, he was particularly active in gathering signatures for Călin Georgescu. He is currently under judicial control for using far-right inscriptions during the electoral campaign of 2024. Marian Burcea features as the main guard from the security team of Călin Georgescu. He was an elite shooter in the French Legion and a *comando* military in the French Guyana, Brasilia and Mali[4]. He is currently under judicial procedure on breaches to the constitutional order, along Horațiu Potra.

Colour purple in the graph is assigned to George Simion, a populist leader himself that was supportive of Călin Georgescu during the 2024 presidential electoral campaign. He is the leader of the main populist party in Romania, AUR; a young political organisation that gathers more than forty percent of electoral support at the moment[5]. George Simion was banned in the

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[2] https://context.ro/banii-sistemului-pentru-fiul-lui-calin-georgescu-clubul-sau-de-tenis-din-herastrau-finantat-de-firme-de-stat-antrenamentele-lui-cosmin-georgescu-din-germania-costau-5-000-de-marci-pe-luna/ accessed on the 29th of November 2025.

[3] „Gogu Puiu și Haiducii Dobrogei" Dobrogea

[4] https://www.riseproject.ro/investigations/uncategorized/garda-lui-calin-georgescu/ accessed on the 30th of November 2025.

[5] https://www.inscop.ro/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/13.10.2025-BAROMETRUL-Informat.ro-INSCOP-Intentie-vot-alegeri-parlamentare.pdf accessed on the 29th of November 2025.

Republic of Moldova and Ukraine for destabilising activities and pro-Russian propaganda[6]. Simion started his public career in football ultras movements being a founder of two such associations[7]. In 2024 George Simion was elected in the European Parliament on the list of the party he founded in 2019. The head of AUR Party and Călin Georgescu forged their first political alliance in the Romanian political scene in 2022. George Simion was a presidential candidate himself in 2024, and he orchestrated his second-round presidential campaign on the promise that if elected, Călin Georgescu was to become prime minister. His discourses around this topic brought him 3,6 million votes in the presidential elections, after the annulment of the first round and the formal elimination of Călin Georgescu from the presidential race.

Another cluster of the egocentric network of Călin Georgescu is the one that comprises the influential people from his ministerial journey. We introduced in the corpus Marcian Bleahu from the Ministry of the Environment, together with Sorin Frunzăverde, the formal employer of the populist leader back then. Călin Georgescu entered the ministry without clear criteria. It turned out that Marcian Bleahu had been an informant of the Romanian Securitate[8] in the former regime. Sorin Frunzăverde served as Ministry of the Environment, then of Defence and Tourism, later to be convicted of unruly influence.

A special place in the ego network of Călin Georgescu is occupied by Mircea Geoană, a grey light blue in the chart. The populist leader was first a councillor for Geoană at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where the latter was a minister. Georgescu continued his career in that ministry as director of the Direction for International Economic Organisations. As for Mircea Geoană, he is one of the most known political actors in Romanian politics, having occupied various important positions, such as ambassador to the United States, Minister of Foreign Affairs, president of the Senate, president of the Social Democratic Party, as well as Deputy Secretary General of NATO. Mircea Geoană was as well a candidate in the presidential elections of 2024.

From the realm of the secret services (Ursu) stand out Cristian Troncotă[9] and Corvin Lupu, enforcers of the academic status of the populist leader. We find here academics hosting the book launch of Călin Georgescu, where he explains the current situation of Romania as the matrix. Corvin Lupu is currently a university professor in a regional university. After the first round

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[6]https://www.g4media.ro/george-simion-de-la-agitator-marginal-la-potential-cel-mai-puternic-om-din-romania-presa-internationala.html accessed on the 30th of November 2025

[7] „Uniți sub tricolor" and „Honor et Patria"

[8] Romanian Intelligence Service during the communist era

[9] https://www.aktual24.ro/interviu-andrei-ursu-vechea-securitate-l-a-creat-pe-calin-georgescu-ca-sa-schimbe-drumul-romaniei-in-europa-nu-s-a-produs-o-separare-a-apelor-intre-securitate-si-noul-sri-iata-un-exemplu/ accessed on the 29th of November 2025.

of elections, he expressed his support for the populist leader at the online podcast DisTV. The other participant in this cluster is Cristian Troncotă, former dean of the National Academy of Information and professor at the same regional university.

Mircea Malița occupies a special place in the egocentric network of Călin Georgescu, being considered by the populist candidate as his mentor and a constant source of inspiration. Malița was a deputy Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education during the first part of the communist regime. He was as well an ambassador to the United States. He was, among other things, a member of the preparatory committees for the world conferences of the United Nations.

The light green of the chart is reserved to the business people that supported the populist candidate in his electoral race either with money or symbolically. The businessman Bogdan Peșchir, known as Bogpr on Tik-Tok actively fed the popularity of Călin Georgescu on the digital platforms. A document made public by the National Council of Defence[10] showed that he financed the campaign of the populist leader with almost one million EUROS through a system of Tik Tok donations in live sessions[11]. The Moldovan oligarch Ilan Șor expressed as well his enthusiastic support for Călin Georgescu on the social platforms, especially Telegram[12]. Șor became rather famous, among other things, for having tried to corrupt the Moldovan presidential elections from 2024[13]. In the same cluster we find Roland Schatz, the founder of the international organizations Media Tenor International and United Nations Global Sustainable Index Institute, and another sponsor of Călin Georgescu[14]. The populist leader had worked for Schatz while living in Austria for a few years.

The sociometric analysis of the good faith of Călin Georgescu

This section of the paper represents the empirical analysis, the core of the demonstration. Here we have two simple matrixes, that face each other and where we see how the populist leader takes a position towards some people from his egocentric network, versus how these individuals position themselves

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[10] https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Documente%20CSAT/Document%20CSAT%20SRI%20I.pdf accessed on the 29th of April 2025

[11] https://www.g4media.ro/exclusiv-cum-faceau-influencerii-lui-calin-georgescu-bani-din-donatiile-pe-live-uri-cine-este-bogpr-regele-donatiilor-care-a-dat-cadouri-de-sute-de-mii-de-dolari-pe-live-uri-de-tik.html accessed on the 29th of April 2025

[12] https://www.g4media.ro/reactie-furioasa-a-oligarhului-prorus-ilan-sor-dupa-ce-romania-a-anulat-alegerile-prezidentiale.html accessed on the 29th of April 2025

[13] https://www.zdg.md/investigatii/ancheta/video-in-slujba-moscovei-trei-luni-printre-robii-lui-sor-investigatie-zdg-sub-acoperire/ accessed on the 29th of April 2025

[14] https://www.presshub.ro/calin-georgescu-finantat-de-un-critic-al-lui-trump-cine-este-roland-schatz-363649/ accessed on the 29th of April 2025

towards the populist leader. We fill the matrix with verifiable positions expressed in the public sphere, statements that can be tracked back to their source. The three possible positions within the matrix are: minus one, representing rejection and distance, zero, representing neutrality, and plus one, attraction and validation. We believe it is useful to have a mirror perspective on the consistency between the parts involved, and sociometry is just the methodological window that allows a demonstration. We sorted out the instances where there was no reciprocity of position between the *ego* and the *alter*.

Public declarations of Călin Georgescu about people in his egocentric network

Value	-1	0	+1
Eugen Sechila	"He was not introduced to me, he did not present himself, did not speak"[15]		
Horațiu Potra	"I heard about him myself, of course (…) I know about him just as much as you do yourself (…) I have never met him in person, I have no reason to say I did, I know as much as everybody else"[16].		
George Simion	"Because he is not the man of his people, of the ones that really support him, he is the man of other people,		

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[15]https://hotnews.ro/breaking-news-calin-georgescu-surprins-inainte-de-emisiunea-de-la-tuca-cand-se-sfatuia-cu-insotitorul-sau-eugen-sechila-lider-al-miscarii-neo-legionare-din-romania-si-cel-care-organizeaza-tabere-p-1853322 accessed on the 20th of June 2025

[16]https://hotnews.ro/ce-a-raspuns-calin-georgescu-intrebat-daca-il-cunoaste-pe-horatiu-potra-liderul-gruparii-de-mercenari-care-a-actionat-in-africa-1857199 accessed on the 28th of May 2025

	of the ones that have nothing in common with people's wellbeing"[17].		
Mircea Malița			"My maestro, Mircea Malița. My mentor"[19]
Ilan Șor	"This one joined politics only to get rid of the prosecution of 15 years in jail"[18]		

Public positions of the *alters* in the egocentric network of Călin Georgescu

Value	-1	0	+1
Eugen Sechila			He accompanies CG at public events and TV shows they speak on the phone.
Horațiu Potra			The two have been observed together at the Ciolpani farm[20] and at Marriot Hotel[21]. Potra

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[17]https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-prezidentiale-2025/ce-declara-calin-georgescu-despre-george-simion-in-noiembrie-fereste-ma-doamne-de-cel-viclean-3155721   accessed on the 28th of May 2025

[18]https://www.digi24.ro/alegeri-parlamentare-2024/calin-georgescu-sustine-ca-ideile-lui-ilan-sor-sunt-interesante-portretul-oligarhului-fugit-la-moscova-apare-intr-o-carte-din-2022-3031753 accessed on the 7th of June 2025.

[19]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCKbazlDAK4&ab_channel=C%C4%83linGeorgescu-CanalulOficial 00:02 accessed on the 4th of June 2025

[20]https://romania.europalibera.org/a/georgescu-ferma-cioplani-sechila-potra/33238597.html accessed on the 28th of May 2025

[21]https://www.g4media.ro/fotografii-care-arata-ca-georgescu-il-cunostea-pe-horatiu-potra-calin-georgescu-duminica-la-realitatea-tv-nu-l-am-intalnit-n-am-de-ce-sa-spun-lucrul-asta-luni-aveam.html accessed on the 28th of May 2025

		rented cars for Georgescu to use.
George Simion	Simion publicly denounced CG in 2022 for praising far right political characters from the interwar and WWII period.[22]	The two formed a political duo in 2024, Simion declared that he is the 'designated heir' of CG[23].
Mircea Malița	"Călin Georgescu is using the image of Mircea Malița in the interest of his own electoral promotion"[24].	
Ilan Șor		Ilan Șor openly expressed his support for Călin Georgescu in social media[25].

The two descriptive matrices above contain a display of symbolic attractions and rejections between the populist leader and alters from his egocentric network. When we take a close look and corroborate the data in the two charts, we observe that while the populist leader mostly invalidates his acquaintances, these are mainly supporters of the candidate. It is interesting to further analyse whether this dynamic is a mere communication strategy. The populist leader feeds legitimacy from his former mentor, while the

[22]https://www.g4media.ro/calin-georgescu-despre-zelea-codreanu-si-ion-antonescu-codreanu-s-a-luptat-pentru-moralitatea-fiintei-umane-fata-de-martiri-nu-pot-sa-am-pareri-e-nevoie-de-schimbarea-totala-a-sistemului.html accessed on the 7th of May 2025

[23]https://adevarul.ro/alegeri-prezidentiale-2025/george-simion-se-declara-urmasul-desemnat-al-lui-2430523.html accessed on the 28th of May 2025

[24] https://www.antena3.ro/actualitate/calin-georgescu-prins-cu-inca-o-minciuna-nepoata-lui-mircea-malita-il-acuza-ca-s-a-folosit-de-numele-fostului-diplomat-729510.html accessed on the 24th of June

[25]https://hotnews.ro/oligarhul-fugar-ilan-sor-reactie-vehementa-dupa-decizia-ccr-esti-pentru-parteneriat-cu-rusia-pentru-suveranitatea-tarii-tale-gata-nu-ai-nicio-sansa-sa-fii-ales-1855569 accessed on the 24th of June 2025

descendants are merely questioning the instrumental reasoning of the populist leader.

The most supportive, but controversial members of the egocentric network are not given symbolic credit by the populist leader, irrespective of their actual involvement in the electoral activities for Călin Georgescu. We infer a strong instrumental intention and action by the populist candidate, and equally by these supporters. When we take a look at the clusters of the egocentric network, we observe there the security team with pretty diverse occupations, at the limit of criminality. Issues with the law and justice are shadowing some of these individuals. We observe the public delimitations of the populist candidate from these people, even though they have physically protected him all the way through the political race, or gave a lot of money in support of the populist leader. Instead, we observe polite validations towards the respectable, now defunct people, in his history. It is a safe way of siding with the decent ones, while taking a symbolic distance from the less pure ones.

We believe that this is as far as one can be from *bona fides*, on both purity of intention, and sincerity of action. Călin Georgescu is strategically siding with status, while diminishing real life interactions and actual support. In the cases analysed, there is little reciprocity and sincerity in the relation between *ego* and *alters*. It looks like the populist leader is making his best to make a good impression by positioning himself in the respectable leader's club, while looking down and being bluntly disrespectful of the ones really working for him and in his best interest. What is more striking is that the ones symbolically dismissed by the populist candidate do not symbolically give him up, even when he speaks badly about them. Their reward is not symbolic validation, not in our research. All in all, we consider the discursive dance between the ego and the alters as a public relations exercise in looking good by the populist candidate, very far from substantial good faith.

Conclusion

In this research we focused on the popular topic of the populist leader from a fresh angle. We looked at the populist leader from the perspective of his egocentric network and the in/coherences within. We used the classical propositions of sociometry about measuring the human relations in terms of attractions and rejections. The explanatory backbone was represented by the concept of *bona fides*/good faith; that basically refers to the purity of intention and the consequent consistency of action of a social actor in relation to another one. It is a term that originates from the Roman law, and that has made its way in every civil code of Roman inspiration. While currently the term is used mainly in the civil contractual world to define a relation between two parts, in its original meaning it was covering the trust and expectations placed upon a political leader as well. The main research question in this research was

whether the populist leader is of good faith in his real social network. In order to answer this question, we designed a simple sociometric tool where we assigned numerical values to narratives of the populist leader about the alters in his egocentric network, and vice versa. One of the limitations of this research is that the initial exploratory hypothesis did not pass the empirical test, and we reformulate it, in order to be of use for further research. Thus, we hypothesise that the degree of reciprocity between the ego and the alters in the egocentric networks reflects the degree of good faith of the populist leader. To sum up, the analysis of the egocentric network and the two descriptives matrices present a new way of looking at the populist leader, by means of analysing the attractions and rejections between the ego and alters within the egocentric network. Our research paints a rather grey picture of the asymmetries between the populist leader that rejects his most supportive alters, while symbolically appropriating publicly convenient people of status. The most surprising finding was not that Călin Georgescu is inconsistent, but that he is much more interested in his image than in his social deeds. The form seems to largely take precedence over the substance.

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