

# CORONAVIRUS AND NON-VIOLENT POLITICAL RADICALIZATION IN ROMANIA

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## ABSTRACT

The article puts forward the hypothesis that Romanian citizens who have not been complying with the social distancing rules imposed by the government are involved in a non-violent political radicalization process. Drawing on James C. Scott's theories on forms of daily resistance to illegitimate domination, the text equates this non-violent form of political radicalization with *hidden transcript*. In the case of Romania, hidden transcript refers mainly to partial or half-compliance with social distancing rules. Hidden transcript may be a fruitful theoretical approach to explain why some Romanian citizens wear face masks in a rather improper manner, that is, under their nose, under their chin, around the arm or around the leg. By employing a macro-, meso- and micro-approach, the article has examined the measures taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic that in conjunction with previous structural conditions may lead to a non-violent process of political radicalization.

**Keywords:** political radicalization, hidden transcript, COVID-19, Romania.

## INTRODUCTION

As a low capacity state, Romania has run into trouble in dealing effectively with the COVID-19 pandemic. More precisely, a rather neo-patrimonial bureaucracy has had constant difficulties in applying the “test, trace, isolate” strategy (Devlin, 2020) that was recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). Romania has started to test on a larger scale only at the end of the state of emergency that spanned March 15 to May 15. Public health experts assessed in late March that Romania should carry out between 8,000 and 10,000 coronavirus tests per day (Dogioiu, 2020). Such a testing capacity would have allowed Romanian authorities to have a bird's eye view on the community spread of SARS-CoV-2. A quick glance at the testing process conducted by the Romanian authorities

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reveals that 10,000 tests per day were carried out only once in April. In May, there were nine days with more than 10,000 tests, 16 days in June, and 29 days in July. These figures show that Romania's testing capacity for SARS-CoV-2 has constantly improved since late February, when the first case of COVID-19 was registered in Romania. Eventually, a too slow development of Romania's testing capacity combined with public measures of constantly easing the March and April lockdown have revealed a different picture on the community spread of the new coronavirus. From a couple of hundreds of COVID-19 cases in early June, Romania has constantly registered more than 1,000 cases per day since mid-July. I am not dwelling at this point of discussion on how government errors in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic along with a significant number of Romanian citizens, who have been not willing to abide by the social distancing rules, have produced more the 1,000 COVID-19 cases daily since mid-July. The point is that Romania's testing capacity has evolved too slow and Romanian authorities had a better view on the SARS-CoV-2 community spread when they had already ended the general lockdown. Beside an underdeveloped testing capacity, Romanian authorities have faced huge difficulties in tracing the COVID-19 patients and their contacts. What accounts for an underdeveloped capacity of tracing COVID-19 cases is a significant deficit of resources, and especially of epidemiologists, of the local public health directions. Based on data that went public at the end of 2019, some Romanian counties have had either none or only one epidemiologist: Brăila (0), Giurgiu (0), Ialomița (0), Buzău (1), Caraș-Severin (1), Călărași (1), Bistrița-Năsăud (1) (Răvdan, 2020). There is hardly a surprise that some of the above-mentioned counties have carried out no COVID-19 tests in almost five months since the SARS-CoV-2 entered Romania in late February. Or, when tests were carried out, they were conducted in another county. Moreover, due to a massive deficit of doctors and qualified personnel, the epidemiologic investigations that need to be conducted for every new COVID-19 patient have constantly had a very limited range in Romania. In comparison to South Korea, that manages to trace around 300 contacts per every COVID-19 case, Romanian authorities have usually traced 20 to 30 contacts per case (Both, 2020). In addition, Romanian authorities have faced important difficulties when dealing with the Romanian workers who returned home in March and April from the-then "red zones" of Europe, that is, certain regions especially from Italy and Spain. Tellingly, out of 912,800 Romanian citizens who returned to Romania from different Western states between the end of February and mid-March, only 1.3 per cent were either quarantined or isolated (Pușcaș 2020). In short, due to a low capacity state, Romanian authorities have run into trouble in implementing the "test, trace, isolate" strategy and, consequently, have not curbed in an effective manner the community spread of the SARS-CoV-2.

The article seeks to demonstrate that, due to certain measures that Romanian authorities have adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, a soft, non-violent, political radicalization emerged in Romania. In my view, the outright refusal or resistance of a significant part of Romanian citizens to abide by the social distancing

rules imposed by the government may signal a *hidden transcript*. Coined by James C. Scott (1990), the hidden transcript consists in both discursive and behavioural practices through which a dominated population reacts against the public transcript of dominant elite perceived with low levels of legitimacy. It is already a common place in institutional studies that low capacity states have been traditionally characterized by low levels of trust, both vertical and horizontal. Albeit part of NATO and the EU, Romania has constantly had lower scores of both vertical and horizontal trust in comparison to the average trust specific to the European Union. The process of political radicalization is examined at three levels, that is, measures taken by the government, elite discourse and behaviour of the population.

The article is organized in the following manner. The first section is mainly theoretical and seeks to unravel the main concepts of this article that is political radicalization and the issue of hidden transcript, understood as an instance of soft, non-violent, political radicalization. The next section addresses some public measures taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also discusses the “blame the population” narrative through which some members of the government have sought to move the responsibility for the sharp increase in daily COVID-19 cases from the government to the population. The last section argues that, as an answer to some measures of the government and the “blame the population” narrative, a significant part of Romanian population has refused to abide by the social distancing measures. As a non-violent form of political radicalization, such a response is an instance of hidden transcript.

#### **HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT, A FORM OF NON-VIOLENT POLITICAL RADICALIZATION**

The hypothesis this article puts forward is that some Romania citizens’ behaviour of not abiding by the social distancing measures may be interpreted as a hidden transcript, namely, a non-violent form of political radicalization. Prior to delving into the meaning of political radicalization that I have employed in this article, I unravel the concept of *hidden transcript*. Hidden transcript is a form of anger from below that usually turns into a ritual of insubordination. Such a ritual consists mostly in hidden discursive and non-discursive practices that are one step away from provoking the dominant authority. In contrast to hidden transcript, public transcript refers to “the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” (Scott, 1990: 2). Power, understood either as shaping behaviours or creating discourses, has always entailed a reaction to it. Consequently, public transcript, as the formal instantiation of public power, creates an informal reaction to it in the guise of hidden transcript. As a set of offstage discursive and non-discursive practices, hidden transcript consists in “speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in public transcript” (Scott, 1990: 5). Poaching, pilfering, clandestine tax evasions, gossip and rumors are the behaviour and discursive practices the hidden transcript is normally made of,

according to James C. Scott. In a totalitarian political setting, the above-mentioned practices could be interpreted as political ones. For instance, during the communist regime, Romanian citizens never organized a political protest, except for two spontaneous strikes that happened in the late 1970s and late 1980s in Valea Jiului and Braşov, respectively. Instead, most Romanian citizens were involved in hidden transcript-like practices, such as political jokes about Ceauşescu and the Securitate, stealing from the state, shoddy work and sometimes petty wreckings of the socialist production process. What matters for this article is that hidden transcript, as a form of non-violent political radicalization, tends to be present in almost all institutional settings with low levels of legitimacy. Thus, hidden transcript may also be construed as a form of political opposition against a repressive or barely legitimate regime that is employed mainly by people who “continue to be not citizens, but subjects” (Scott, 1990, p. 199). Hidden transcript is mostly resorted to by those subjects who have not “internalized the norms of the dominant, but because a structure of surveillance, reward, and punishment makes it prudent for them to comply” (Scott, 1990, p. 193). It is worth mentioning that hidden transcript tends to become more prominent especially in times of crisis, when the legitimation of the dominant political regime tends to collapse. Under such circumstances, hidden transcript’s prevalent offstage contour gets some public overtones and turns itself into a partial or half-compliance with formal rules.

Radicalization refers to a process by which individuals are ideologically shaped and, thus, they turn from moderate mainstream beliefs to extreme views (Bartlett and Miller, 2011, p. 2). The process of radicalization tends to be an intricate one that does not follow cause-effect logic in most cases. Different degrees of radicalization (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008) have been examined by many theories that have sought to explain how a moderate individual turns into a radical one. From this perspective, the French sociology theory, the social movements and network theory and also case-study based approaches have identified identity, group and individual variables that may explain what lies behind a radicalization process (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010). It is beyond the scope of this section to delve into the above-mentioned theories, as they all take into consideration violent forms of radicalization. I am interested in non-violent forms of radicalization, that usually emerge in societies where individuals feel that they have been left behind by the state (Bartlett and Miller, 2011; Voutyras, 2016). And yet such individuals do not get involved in a violent process of radicalization but rather in discursive and non-discursive practices specific to a hidden transcript.

The most widespread meaning of radicalization belongs to the field of security studies and refers to what happens before the bomb goes off (Sedgwick, 2010). The meaning of radicalization I employ in this article stems from the field of anthropology and political sciences. It refers to a process of “incomplete compliance” with formal rules that draws more and more citizens in political milieus characterized by low levels of political legitimacy. The lower the political legitimacy of a political regime, the deeper the process of “incomplete compliance”

with its formal rules. In other words, I construe hidden transcript as a form of non-violent political radicalization towards a barely legitimate state. Consequently, I skip the securitization approaches of radicalization that are restricted to exploring mostly the discursive and non-discursive practices of young male immigrants in Western states. Instead, I turn to a form of non-violent political radicalization, manifested in the guise of hidden transcript, which is not a threat to democracy (Voutyras, 2016). Such a form of political non-violent radicalization may be explored by focusing “upon more complex contextual, discursive, or anthropological factors” (Steiner and Önnersfors, 2018, p. 5). The article uses a macro-, meso-, and micro-approach that pays heed to political measures adopted by the Romanian state during the COVID-19 pandemic, the “blame the population” narrative used by political elites and the “incomplete compliance” of some Romanian citizens with the social distancing rules. The next section discusses some political measures that apparently have been taken to defend mostly the interests of the state and not of the entire population.

#### **HOW THE STATE HAS DEFENDED ITSELF FROM CORONAVIRUS. THE “BLAME THE POPULATION” NARRATIVE**

As I have already stated in the previous section, I’ve employed a three-tier explanatory model, that is, a macro-, meso-, and micro-approach, in order to explain the emergence of non-violent political radicalization in Romania. In this section, the analysis focuses upon the macro- and the meso-level. More precisely, this section brings to the fore those measures taken by the Romanian authorities that may have prompted a significant part of Romanian citizens to refuse to wear face masks in public places. It also addresses the “blame the population” narrative endorsed by some members of the government. The administrative decisions this section delves into are the following: bringing the army to the streets, a significant number of huge fines during the state of emergency, the suspension of human rights, and the so-called “Quarantine Law” according to which even asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers are forced to stay in public hospitals for at least 48 hours.

This section draws on Claus Offe’s theory of the state. In essence, Offe argues that the state is the main instrument of capitalist accumulation. Simultaneously though, the state is not necessarily dominated by the agents of capitalism. As any other political institution, the state has an interest in itself (Borchert and Lessenich, 2016, p. 38). That is why the state systematically seeks to legitimate itself through infrastructural measures and welfare policies (Borchert and Lessenich, 2016, p. 36). The more legitimate a state is, the more rational its existence. Beside the fact that it seeks to defend the interests of investors and those of the population, every state needs to preserve its own interests. More precisely, there is a state bureaucracy, sometimes made of very well-paid public clerks, who are directly interested in the state’s institutional reproduction in order to preserve their social status and privileges. By looking at the state of its fiscal capacity,

bureaucracy and infrastructural capacity, one swiftly understands that Romanian state's institutional capacity is rather underdeveloped. In theory, low capacity states tend to resort to authoritarian measures in order to preserve their institutional reproduction. Such an authoritarian penchant is more conspicuous in times of crisis. I now turn to the measures taken by the state in Romania in order to defend its own interests during the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the outset of the state of emergency, the Romanian government brought the army on the streets. Many other states resorted to their armies in an attempt to curb the community spread of SARS-CoV-2. Therefore, at least at first glance, there was nothing peculiar regarding such a measure. On the contrary, it was a legal measure, in line with military ordinance number 3, according to which the government is entitled to resort to the army in order to control the community spread of coronavirus. I do not question the legal character of such a measure. I question its legitimacy. Many Romanian citizens had a hard time explaining to themselves how 10,000 soldiers, fully equipped for war, with tanks and other military vehicles were to fight the new coronavirus. Despite Colonel Spînu reassuring message that the presence on the streets of fully-equipped 10,000 soldiers had nothing to do with "the militarization of daily life", this is exactly what many Romanian citizens understood.<sup>1</sup> The army has been involved in Romania in the effort of building mobile hospitals and guarding certain strategic objectives during the state of emergency. However, the presence on the streets of different Romanian cities of fully-equipped 10,000 soldiers with specific military gear seemed to be the public transcript of a rather low capacity state riddled with a legitimacy crisis. Such a state chose to show its muscles to its citizens. This display of force was rather short-lived, as some officials probably understood the political side effects of such a measure. But instead of increasing the legitimacy of the state, it is highly likely that the presence of the army on the streets strengthened its illegitimacy.

Another measure, that also seems specific to a state worried for its own political reproduction, refers to a significant number of large fines. During the state of emergency, more than 300, 000 Romanian citizens were fined for not abiding by the regulations imposed by the government<sup>2</sup> What is noteworthy, is the amount of these fines, that ranged from €415 to €4,150. Even the minimum fine of €415 was almost two times larger than the minimum wage in Romania, that is earned by around two million employees, which accounts for roughly 35 per cent of the whole employed population. The maximum fine of €4,150 took aback many Romanian citizens, considering that less than 1 per cent of the employees in Romania earn more than €1,500 per month.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/10-000-de-militari-au-iesit-pe-strazi-de-ce-acestia-sunt-echipati-in-tinuta-de-lupta-1281031>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-12/More-than-300-000-Romanians-fined-for-breaking-lockdown-rules-QqXR3HGncY/index.html>.

The third measure adopted by a low capacity state concerned for its own political reproduction refers to a contentious law that forces even asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers to spend at least 48 hours in a hospital. During the state of emergency, all COVID-19 patients, either with specific symptoms or with no symptoms at all, were forced to stay in the hospital. Otherwise, they faced legal action. Under such circumstances, some asymptomatic carriers were forced to spend even two months in the same hospital before receiving two consecutive negative COVID-19 tests. Once the state of emergency came to an end, the Romanian Constitutional Court (RCC) stated that the Government had no right to forcefully put COVID-19 patients in public hospitals based only on emergency ordinances. Thus, the RCC recommended the Government to come up with a specific law that was to be endorsed by a political majority in the Parliament. Eventually, the Government devised such a law which has been heavily contested by both Romanian and international doctors. The contestants claim that COVID-19 carriers, no matter if they are symptomatic or asymptomatic ones, cannot be forcefully put in a hospital.<sup>3</sup> For a low capacity state like Romania, the tension between security and human rights has grown deeper and deeper during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last, but not least, Romania was one of the those European states that activated the derogation included in Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights during the state of emergency. The other states were Latvia, Estonia, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova. Based on the provisos of Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights, signatory states have the right to derogate from the provisions guaranteeing the protection of human rights but only after the prior notification of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe. State of emergency does not necessarily entail such a measure. Moreover, the Romanian government did not define the limits of the derogation. Politically, this was hardly a smart move by the Romanian government.<sup>4</sup> The so-called “illiberal democracies” of the European Union, such as Hungary and Poland, refrained from applying for such a derogation. Moreover, the other European countries that asked for such a derogation were only former Soviet republics.

In conjunction with the abovementioned measures, the Government sought to find different scape goats for the rather ineffective way it had dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. What was especially concerning, was that the government party, which had strongly endorsed that “rule of law narrative” in Romania, signalled either the Constitutional Court of Romania or the People’s Advocate Institution as scape goats for some administrative blunders.<sup>5</sup> Beside the fact that the

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/traian-basescu-legea-asta-minune-este-cea-mai-mare-prostie-si-omare-ticalosie-romania-nu-avea-ne\\_1487081.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/traian-basescu-legea-asta-minune-este-cea-mai-mare-prostie-si-omare-ticalosie-romania-nu-avea-ne_1487081.html).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.g4media.ro/de-ce-s-a-grabit-romania-consiliul-europei-nu-incurajeaza-staile-membre-sa-ceara-derogari-de-la-cedo-purtator-de-cuvant-masurile-de-urgenta-adoptate-pentru-combaterea-epidemieii-nu-justifica-activa.html>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://ziare.com/politica/stiri-politice/senatorul-pnl-iuliana-scantei-acuzatii-la-adresa-psd-despre-situatia-epidemiologica-din-romania-nu-au-facut-altceva-decat-sa-zadarniceasca-incercarea-cetatenilor-si-a-medicilor-de-a-se-trata-1621734>.

propensity of finding such scape goats is specific rather to the “illiberal democracies” of the European Union, the government also concocted a “blame the population” narrative. Such a narrative was rather a surprise, considering that President Iohannis, the de-facto Prime Minister of Romania during the state of emergency, has supported a different perspective. According to President Iohannis, a partnership between public authorities and the Romanian citizens is the only way to stop the community spread of SARS-CoV-2. “It depends on each and every one of us, together, to contain the spread of this epidemic”.<sup>6</sup> President Iohannis’s narrative has been endorsed by only one member of the government, that is, Ionel Dancă, head of the Prime Minister’s Chancellery. According to Dancă, “we need to make a joint effort to limit the spread of COVID-19 infections”.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Health Minister Nelu Tătaru held that “How have we turned into the plague of Europe? By not complying with the rules or by instigating against abiding by the rules”.<sup>8</sup> In another public statement with paternalistic overtones, Health Minister Tătaru argued: “I hope we are not turning into a police state, but the population needs to understand that we are going through a difficult time. (...) If we legally enforce the hospitalization, isolation and the treatment of patients in hospitals, then we will curb this transmission”.<sup>9</sup> Prime Minister Orban opined that “If more Romanians comply with the rules, the risk of infections diminishes. We severely prompt all institutions of control to be everywhere, in order to fine all those people who do not comply with the rules”.<sup>10</sup> The “blame the population” narrative that prominent members of the Government resorted to, has been sanctioned by different politicians and health experts. For instance, former president Traian Băsescu argued that “through communication, public authorities were compelled to turn the population into their partner”.<sup>11</sup> Also, the representative of WHO in Romania, doctor Alexandru Rafila, stated that “We need enlighten people to become our partners”.<sup>12</sup>

#### NOT COMPLYING WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES, AS A FORM OF HIDDEN TRANSCRIPT

Seemingly, many Romanian citizens have not complied with the social distancing rules imposed by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a behaviour has been explained mainly by resorting to psychological approaches.

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.dcnnews.ro/record-de-infectari-iohannis-doar-asa-rezolvam-problema\\_761064.html](https://www.dcnnews.ro/record-de-infectari-iohannis-doar-asa-rezolvam-problema_761064.html).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cotidianul.ro/avertisment-dinspre-guvern-situatie-limita/>.

<sup>8</sup> [https://inpolitics.ro/tataru-am-ajuns-ciuma-europei\\_18446109.html](https://inpolitics.ro/tataru-am-ajuns-ciuma-europei_18446109.html).

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.economica.net/restrictii-stare-de-urgenta-prag-rosu-coronavirus-pacienti-terapie-intensiva-covid-paturi-ati\\_187816.html](https://www.economica.net/restrictii-stare-de-urgenta-prag-rosu-coronavirus-pacienti-terapie-intensiva-covid-paturi-ati_187816.html).

<sup>10</sup> <https://cluj24.ro/avertismentul-lui-orban-ne-gandim-la-toate-mijloacele-possible-ca-sa-limitam-raspandirea-15517.html>.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/traian-basescu-trage-cu-tunul-orban-vela-tataru-si-arafat-trebuie-sa-plece-trebuie-alta-echipa-populatia-a-fost-umilita\\_1489264.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/traian-basescu-trage-cu-tunul-orban-vela-tataru-si-arafat-trebuie-sa-plece-trebuie-alta-echipa-populatia-a-fost-umilita_1489264.html).

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/alexandru-rafila-explica-unde-a-gre-it-guvernul-si-motivul-pentru-care-romania-este-comparata-cu-bra\\_1489672.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/alexandru-rafila-explica-unde-a-gre-it-guvernul-si-motivul-pentru-care-romania-este-comparata-cu-bra_1489672.html).

However, psychologists have focused chiefly on the so-called coronavirus sceptics and deniers. So have done some sociologists, who have come up with the conclusion that coronavirus sceptics are “subjects of an imperfect urbanization”<sup>13</sup> that made them prone to conspiracy theories. In my view, coronavirus sceptics and deniers are just the core of a larger category of individuals who do not comply with social distancing rules out of political reasons. In this category should also be included individuals that either do not wear face masks in public places or wear such masks incorrectly. By my reckoning, I believe there is a significant number of Romanian citizens who wear face masks in a rather improper manner, that is, under their nose, under their chin, around the arm or around the leg. A IRES survey, that was carried out in early April, revealed that almost 95 per cent of the subjects were willing to wear face masks in public places.<sup>14</sup> President Iohannis claimed that, based on certain sociological studies, almost 90 per cent of the Romanian citizens comply with social distancing rules.<sup>15</sup> A recent IRES survey, however, revealed that 24 per cent of the subjects declared that they were either little concerned or completely unconcerned by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, there is highly likely that rather 24 per cent of the Romanian citizens, instead of 10 per cent, tend to not abide by the social distancing rules. Different epidemiologists have claimed that not even 50 per cent of the Romanian citizens wear face masks in a proper way. If such a behaviour would have emerged, Romania had not registered more than 1,000 COVID-19 cases per day since mid-July. In my view, coronavirus sceptics and deniers, but especially those Romanian citizens that wear face masks in a rather improper manner, are part and parcel of a non-violent political radicalization process. This half-compliance or incomplete compliance with the social distancing rules is an instantiation of hidden transcript, that is, non-violent political radicalization process that has occurred in a low capacity state, with low levels of vertical and horizontal trust. Some of the measures adopted by Romanian authorities, that I have already presented in the above section, in conjunction with the “blame the population” narrative employed by top government officials have triggered this process of non-violent political radicalization.

In the following, I outline some structural traits of a propitious political context for the occurrence of non-violent political radicalization, in the form of hidden transcript. The traits that I dwell on are related to low levels of vertical and horizontal trust, and social inequality.

Regarding the issue of trust, trust in the government has been rather low in Romania for the last three decades. In contrast to the average EU trust in the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://ziare.com/stiri/eveniment/sociologul-barbu-mateescu-despre-conspirationisti-nu-sunt-100-la-suta-cu-mintea-nici-in-secolul-19-dar-nici-in-secolul-21-1621440>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/sondaj-ires-raed-arafat-personalitatea-public%C4%83-a-momentului/30548879.html>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.businessmagazin.ro/actualitate/iohannis-cei-care-nu-respecta-norme-sanitare-vor-fi-amendati-e-19448246>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/sondaj-ires-ce-cred-romanii-despre-epidemia-de-coronavirus.html>.

government, of 42 per cent, trust in Government Orban, a rather minoritarian government that has ruled Romania during the COVID-19 pandemic, is at 24 per cent, according to a IRES survey. Gabriel Bădescu explored Romanian civil society from the perspective of generalized trust, based on the premise that associative life generates social capital of a bridging type. Bădescu noted that generalized trust in Romania was pretty low in the early 2000s. According to a survey conducted by Bădescu himself, 67% of respondents said they had low and very low confidence in individuals of different ethnicity, while 61 % of respondents stated that they didn't trust individuals of different confession (Uslaner and Bădescu, 2004). One can surmise from this that generalized trust was overridden by particular trust. "In Romania, only 25 percent of the population are fully trusting (by religion and ethnicity); in Moldova, it is just 13 percent" (Uslaner and Bădescu, 2004, p. 225). Bădescu's conclusion is that one cannot speak of a civil society in Romania in the 2000s. Bădescu identifies two major factors that contributed to the dissolution of social capital in Romania. First, the political socialism specific to the Communist regime, which taught the citizens not to trust their own neighbours (Uslaner and Bădescu, 2004, p. 219). Secondly, the transition process in Romania has had too many losers and an increased social inequality. As such, a dissolving factor of social capital was the transition from communism itself.

More than a decade after the start of the post-communist transition, bonding social capital continued to be the preeminent form of capital in Romania (Voicu, 2005). Data collected at the beginning of the 2000s confirms this phenomenon. The first dimension of social capital, i.e. *sociability*, which can be operationalized as a measure by the number of meetings with friends, we note that Romania belongs to the category of countries where people rarely meet outside of their workplace. Thirty-six per cent of Romanians who live in urban areas meet with friends at least once a week, while in rural areas the percentage drops to 31 per cent (Bădescu, Comşa and Sandu, 2006). *Associationism*, as the second component of social capital, is poorly developed in Romania. At the end of the 1990s, only six per cent of the inhabitants of rural areas were members of associations other than political, religious and trade union ones. In urban areas, the percentage was closer to 14 per cent, but still far from the European mean values (Bădescu et al., 2006). In 2005, the situation was unchanged. Five per cent of rural inhabitants were members of a non-profit association, as opposed to 16 per cent of Romanians living in urban areas. From the perspective of trust in people, also referred to as *generalized trust*, Romania had low levels compared to the countries of Western Europe. For example, over 50 per cent of Scandinavian citizens said they trusted people, while the percentage dropped to 30 per cent in Western Europe (Bădescu et al., 2006). In Romania, only ten per cent of citizens said they could trust other people, the percentage not recording significant variations in rural and urban areas (Bădescu et al., 2006).

Low levels of vertical and horizontal trust, combined with increasing social inequality, form an institutional milieu that is not conducive for a wide-scale emergence of formal behaviors, in line with social distancing measures imposed by

the government. According to the Gini coefficient, Romania is the fourth most unequal country in the European Union. This is hardly a surprise, considering that even leftist governments have turned cheap labor into a “comparative advantage” of Romania. This type of “strategic” thinking has always been specific to neo-liberal dependant capitalist countries. In addition, there have been many example of Romanian politicians who defiantly refused to wear face masks in public places. Given this structural conditions, the hypothesis that not abiding by the social distancing rules may be actually an instance of non-violent political radicalization does not seem far-fetched.

### CONCLUSIONS

The article has come up with the hypothesis that Romanian citizens who have not been complying with social distancing rules imposed by the government are involved in a non-violent political radicalization process. Drawing on James C. Scott’s theories on forms of daily resistance to illegitimate domination, I equated this non-violent form of political radicalization with hidden transcript. In the case of Romania, hidden transcript refers mainly to partial, incomplete or half-compliance with social distancing rules. Hidden transcript may be a fruitful theoretical approach to examine why some Romanian citizens wear face masks in a rather improper manner, that is, under their nose, under their chin, around the arm or around the leg. Due to lack of field data, the article has sought to demonstrate that certain circumstantial conditions may have been conducive to the occurrence of a non-violent political radicalization process in Romania during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By employing a macro-, meso- and micro- approach, the article argues that the measures taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic in conjunction with structural conditions may lead to a non-violent process of political radicalization. Taking the army out on the streets, applying a significant number of large fines, activating a derogation from the European Convention of Human Rights and adopting a contentious law that puts in hospitals for 48 hours even asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers, may have decreased the already low levels of political legitimacy of the government that has coped with the coronavirus crisis in Romania. In my view, the “blame the population” narrative employed by some top members of the government may have added insult to injury and, consequently, triggered a hidden transcript. That is, a partial or incomplete compliance with the social distancing rules imposed by the government. The article has focused not only on the category of coronavirus sceptics or deniers. These citizens may be the most radical ones. Instead, I took into consideration a larger category of citizens, the ones who wear face masks under their nose, under their chin, around the arm or around the leg. The article has presented at length both specific measures taken by the government during the COVID-19 pandemic and also deep-seated institutional conditions of Romania, that may have led these citizens to a non-violent form of political radicalization, in the guise of hidden transcript.

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