

# LOW CAPACITY STATE, SOCIAL DISTRUST AND POPULISM: ROMANIA'S VULNERABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

LUCIAN DUMITRESCU<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The article draws on Francis Fukuyama who argues that state capacity, trust, and political leadership are institutional variables that have allowed certain states to deal more effectively with the COVID-19 pandemic than other states. The article critically discusses Fukuyama's tenet and brings to the fore the issue of "middle-quality institutional trap" which combines "tangible" and "intangible" elements. Then, the article examines Fukuyama's perspective in the institutional context of Romania and argues that a low capacity state, low levels of horizontal and vertical trust, and populism instead of political leadership have been vulnerabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Keywords:** state capacity, trust, populism, Romania, COVID-19.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Francis Fukuyama, three institutional variables, i.e., "state capacity, trust, and political leadership" (2020), have made so far the difference among countries seeking to control the COVID-19 pandemic. Fukuyama maintains that socially unequal countries, with low capacity states and illegitimate political leadership, have left "their citizens and economies exposed and vulnerable" (Fukuyama 2020). The fact that the state steps in to deal with rapid social change events, such as natural disasters, economic crises, revolutions or terrorist attacks, comes as no surprise (Borchert and Lessenich 2016; Offe 2015; Alexander *et al.* 2004). An academic literature that highlights the role that different public capacities have played during the COVID-19 pandemic has already emerged (Capano 2020; Capano *et al.* 2020; Mei 2020). In the particular case of Romania,

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucian Dumitrescu works as a researcher at the Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations of the Romanian Academy. E-mail: dulust@gmail.com.

crises that have emerged over time have systematically revealed institutional vulnerabilities of the local state. A plane accident from 2014, which killed a doctor and a well-known Romanian pilot, showed that local people could be more relevant than public institutions when it comes to search and rescue operations, mainly due to the latter's "slow and unorganized intervention" (Radu 2018, 74). On October 30, 2015, a fire broke out at the Colectiv nightclub, killing 64 young people and injuring another 146. In the aftermath of the Colectiv nightclub fire, people took to the streets, the then Prime Minister resigned, and the influential "Corruption kills" slogan emerged. To date, however, no clear culprits have been identified and no significant improvements emerged in terms of emergency medical infrastructure that could help victims of fires. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, between November 14, 2020, and October 1, 2021, twelve fires broke out in public hospitals in Romania killing 31 patients (Luțac 2021). Most of these were COVID-19 patients, who were receiving emergency medical care. After the fire that broke out on October 1, 2021 in a public hospital in Constanța, President Iohannis stated that "the Romanian state failed in its fundamental mission to protect its citizens" (Olteanu 2021).

Broadly speaking, the article rests on a neo-institutional approach which stresses "the mediating role of the institutional contexts in which events occur" (Hay 2002, 12). From this perspective, Romania's "middle-quality institutional trap" (Mazucca, Munck 2020), rather than just corruption, could account for the way public institutions have dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the article argues that state capacity has had a significant impact on the "test, trace, isolate" strategy, especially in 2020 but also in 2021. Also, the article contends that mutual distrust and persistent populism may have affected the vaccination campaign in 2021. In contrast to studies that explain institutional failure by scrutinizing mostly administrative drawbacks (Kamrava 2016), this article looks at both administrative and political vulnerabilities in the case of Romania. The article argues that the ability to mobilize and deploy resources, including a close cooperation among public authorities and most citizens, relies to a large extent on both administrative and political capacity.

The article is organized as follows. The first section seeks to investigate if Fukuyama's tenet on "state capacity, trust, and political leadership", i.e., institutional traits that allegedly have improved the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, is a valid one. Then, the article discusses Romania's testing capacity as a feature of a low capacity state. The following section delves into some mechanisms that have created and reproduced mutual distrust between political elites and the general public in Romania. The final section brings to the fore another instantiation of a low capacity state, that is, "recombinant populism" (Dragoman 2020), instead of political leadership.

**STATE CAPACITY, TRUST, AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.  
DOES FUKUYAMA'S TENET HOLD WATER IN TIMES OF CRISIS?**

The article rests on the claim made by Francis Fukuyama, according to whom “state capacity, trust, and political leadership” (2020) have been key institutional assets that allowed certain states to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic in an effective manner. Fukuyama’s perspective resembles a meta-theory (Mahoney, Rueschemeyer 2003) which combines structure (state capacity and trust) with agency (political leadership) and invites the researcher to come up with more specific hypotheses. The hypothesis that I put forward is that Romania’s middle-quality institutional trap may have interfered with the management of the COVID-19. Specifically, Romania’s low capacity state, mutual distrust and persistent populism have been intervening variables that have affected, first, the “test, trace, isolate” strategy, and, second, the vaccination campaign. In the realm of security studies, the “threat multiplier” theory (Klare 2019) holds that climate change effects are aggravated by fragile states which do not have sufficient institutional resources to provide effective governance. In other words, ethnic strife or migration flows that could lead to political instability are not directly caused by drought, wildfires or desertification. But rather by a poor public management of such phenomena in fragile states. In short, the “threat multiplier” theory argues that the impact of natural disasters is socially produced (Tierney 2014).

I have resorted to Fukuyama’s perspective for two reasons. First, most studies that have delved into the democratization process in Romania have completely discounted different dimensions of state weakness (Rothstein 2011, 152; Zakaria 2021; Mungiu-Pippidi 2017). As a consequence, corruption, which is clearly an expression of state weakness, has turned into an almost universal explanation for Romania’s deep-seated institutional vulnerabilities. Undoubtedly, Romania has had and will surely have an important corruption problem. Without explicitly bringing to the fore the question of corruption, this article looks at one of the main causes that has systematically fed corruption, namely state weakness (Stănescu, Zamfir 2015). Second, Romania’s democratization process has been addressed mainly from a procedural perspective. However, looked at it as a subtype of an overarching concept, such as, “regime” or “state”, the Romanian democracy looks like a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier, Levitsky 1997). Following this logic, one may get a better grasp on some vulnerabilities of Romania’s democracy, such as mutual distrust and persistent populism.

In my view, Fukuyama’s perspective stands for a challenging research design. And yet it needs more conceptual traction. To this end, I have resorted to Mazzuca and Munck’s “middle-quality institutional trap”, which represents a systematic interplay between “flawed democracies and low to medium capacity States” (Mazzuca, Munck 2020, 1). A “flawed democracy” consists mainly in the underrepresentation of citizens, premature termination of constitutional terms,

electoral clientelism, and the influence of money on elections and policy making (Mazzuca and Munck 2020, 14). The most important trait of a low capacity state lies in its underdeveloped coercive and administrative capacity (Mazzuca, Munck 2020, 29). Notably, one of the factors that brings its contribution to the systematic reproduction of the “middle-quality institutional trap” is crony capitalism, which deters significant institutional reforms. For other authors, socioeconomic inequality accounts for persistent institutional weakness in Latin America (Brinks *et al.* 2019, 50). With this in mind and drawing on Offe, who argues that the modern state is systematically torn between its interests, capitalism and democracy (Borchert, Lessenich 2016), I contend that another pillar of the middle-quality institutional trap could be “exclusionary development” (Vukov 2019).

Therefore, in terms of research design, I have turned Fukuyama’s perspective that the article has originally drawn on into the slightly modified concept of “middle-quality institutional trap”. As argued below, Romania can be considered a low capacity state relative to the institutional standards of the European Union. It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the state of democracy in Romania. Situations of democratic backsliding (Gora, de Wilde 2020; Greskovits 2015; Gussi, Goşu 2019) have already been documented with respect to Romania. Also, the democracy in Romania has already been treated like a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier, Levitsky 1997) by authors who have labelled it as an “original democracy” (Durandin, Petre 2010, 148) or “imperfect democracy” (Gussi, Goşu 2019, 57). Also, the article has not interest to look more deeply into what accounts for the emergence of “exclusionary development” (Vukov 2019) in Romania. Of interest for this article is, first, that some administrative and political vulnerabilities of Romania’s institutional milieu could match the middle-quality institutional trap pattern. And, second, that these vulnerabilities may have had a significant bearing on Romania’s political capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Political capacity is reliant on the quality of institutions and political leadership. And it stands for the “behavioral power” (Jagers 1992) of a given state to rapidly mobilize and deploy different types of resources, including a close cooperation among public authorities and the general public.

States that possess a more developed “mobilization and extraction capacity” (Schmidt and Juneau 2012, 70) could be more effective in their effort to reinstate social routine after the occurrence of rapid social change. Theoretically, a high capacity state is capable to “mobilize a large amount of resources in a short time to the most needed place” (Mei 2020, 9) and to “galvanize its administration and society into action to execute its decisions effectively” (Capano *et al.* 2020, 14). A greater mobilization and extraction capacity implies both “tangible” and “intangible” institutions (Fukuyama 2014), that is, a combination of the administrative and political capacities of a given state. In Fukuyama’s account, “tangible institutions” consist in “armies, police, bureaucracies, ministries and the like”, whereas “intangible institutions” refer to “national traditions, symbols,

shared historical memories, and common cultural points of reference” (2014, 185). Other “intangible qualities” (Fukuyama 2014, 60) include the quality and autonomy of a given state’s bureaucracy. In contrast to Eurocentric analyses of security, that usually place emphasis on hardware capabilities, Azar and Moon draw attention to the fact that Third World states have traditionally faced a significant deficit in terms of software capabilities (Azar, Moon 1988). By and large, Azar and Moon’s hardware capabilities stand for Fukuyama’s tangible institutions, whereas software capabilities refer to “legitimacy, integration, and policy capacity” (Azar, Moon 1988). The latter capabilities have a decisive bearing on a given state’s “behavioral power” (Jagers 1992), that is the ability effectively mobilize and deploy different types of resources

State capacity refers to the ‘infrastructural bases of better governance’ (Ganev 2005, 427), “the ability of state institutions to effectively implement official goals” (Hanson, Sigman 2011, 2), or “the degree to which the new types of governance are successful in handling societal and administrative problems for which they have been created” (Nelissen 2002, 12). In essence, state capacity studies seek to measure “either the political or the administrative (which is a conflation of technical and implementational), and sometimes both” (Cummings, Nørgaard 2004, 687). Consequently, operationalizations of state capacity are focused on one, two or more institutional variables, such as, extractive capacity (Thies 2004), bureaucratic capacity (Bersch *et al.* 2017), bureaucratic autonomy (Geddes 1990), the public transport system (Bel 2012), extractive, administrative and coercive capacities (White, Herzog 2016, 3; Hanson, Sigman 2011, 1), or political, ideational, technical and implementational capacities (Cummings, Nørgaard 2004). In contrast to the above, another strain of research places emphasis especially on agency. This literature argues that the development of state capacity is directly influenced by the will of the political elites and, thus, turns state capacity into a dependent variable. The independent variable is “politician’s dilemma” (Geddes 1994), “actors’ normative preferences about democracy” (Mainwaring, Pérez-Liñán 2013, 5), “politics of survival” (Migdal 2009), the political strategy of “good enough governance” (Melville and Mironyuk 2016), partial economic and political reforms (Hellman *et al.* 2003; Hellman 1998). Beside internal actors, external actors also seek to modulate certain public capacities in line with their economic interests. (Bruszt, Vukov 2017; Reinsberg *et al.* 2019).

From a methodological perspective, the article rests on case study research (Gerring 2007; George, Bennett 2005) The article seeks to demonstrate, first, that an administrative vulnerability, such as a low capacity state, has impacted on the “test, trace, isolate” strategy. And, second, that political vulnerabilities, such as mutual distrust and persistent populism, may have affected the vaccination campaign. Vulnerabilities refer to “characteristics of systems and subsystems that are of importance for people and societies ecosystems” (Tierney 2014, 13).

### THE TESTING CAPACITY, AN INSTANTIATION OF ROMANIA'S LOW CAPACITY STATE

This section seeks to demonstrate how Romania's underdeveloped fiscal capacity has impacted on the public health sector during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, due to lack of money and personnel, this sector has run into trouble when implementing the "test, trace, isolate" strategy. The data amassed in this section (George, Bennett 2005) show that Romania's testing capacity has evolved during the pandemic. This notwithstanding, Romanian citizens had to pay for the vast majority of daily COVID-19 tests.

State capacity is a long-term process (Lange, Rueschmeyer 2005) considering that the actual development of institutional capacity has been influenced by previous state building policies (Brinks *et al.* 2019, 35). After the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), Romania moved from the periphery of the Ottoman Empire to the periphery of the German Empire. The local state, that had emerged in the aftermath of the Crimean War, turned into a "neocolonial structure" (Boatcă 2006) that provided cheap labour for local landlords and Western capital. The Great Romania, which occurred in the aftermath of WWI, was also marked by significant institutional weakness (Jowitt 1971). During the communist regime, Ceaușescu was resolutely against promoting competent people both within the Party and the State out of fear of losing his total political control (Malița and Georgescu 2010). Not surprisingly, the state in post-communist Romania "was born weak and weakened further in the early 1990s" (Bohle, Greskowits 2012, 194). In 1999, when the European Council initiated the negotiations for Romania's accession into the European Union, Romania was on the verge of becoming a failed state (Gallagher 2010, 33). Specifically, the fourth miners' strike, that took place between January and February 1999, brought into question the local state capacity's ability to control violence, as the Romanian authorities had just run into trouble in their attempt to get the miners back to the Jiu valley. Instead of strengthening public institutions, post-communist elites were involved in the opposite process of subverting state institutions during the early phases of the democratization process. In addition, neoliberal policies of state building aimed at creating a smaller state (Stănescu and Zamfir 2015), instead of a leaner one (O'Donnell 1993). Therefore, a "reversed Tyllian process" of state building directly led to a "castrated state" (Ganev 2005, 420) and a "predatory bureaucracy" (Stoica 2018, 180) in Romania. This de-bureaucratization process (Ganev 2013, 38) clearly affected Romania's fiscal capacity, which is the most underdeveloped in the European Union. Romania's fiscal capacity is at roughly 27 per cent of the GDP, whereas the average tax capacity of the EU states lies at almost 40 per cent of the GDP (Eurostat 2020). Moreover, Ban argues that Romania is the only ex-communist

state that has made less money since it has joined the EU (2021). Under such circumstances, it comes as no surprise that Romania's transportation infrastructure is the most backward in the European Union (Stolojan 2020, 227).

Lack of money, lack of personnel and a rather incoherent vision on testing are factors that have impeded a rapid development of Romania's testing capacity in the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic and even afterwards. According to the Romanian legislation, public health directions are in charge for both testing and tracing activities related to COVID-19 infections. Public data that was available at the end of 2019 revealed that many Romanian counties 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). Due to a severe shortage of qualified personnel, certain counties in Romania had a limited testing capacity, of up to 200 tests per month in the early phases of the pandemic. Lack of personnel caused delays in epidemiological investigations, many of which were put on hold, and also in the announcement of the results of COVID-19 tests. In 2020, it took even eight to nine days for certain Romanian public health directions to announce the result of COVID-19 tests.

In March and April 2020, when the Romanian government enforced the state of emergency, public health directions carried out between 2,000 and 2,500 COVID-19 tests per day due to lack of money (Lică 2020). Romania's testing capacity increased up to around 15,000 tests per day in mid July but remained unchanged by mid October (Leonte 2020). Then, in November and December 2020, the testing capacity evolved to more than 40, 000 tests per day (Nistoroiu 2021), whereas in January 2021 it returned to roughly 15,000 tests per day. In late November 2020, Prime-Minister Orban stated that Romania had already developed a "nominal testing capacity" of roughly 55, 000 PCR tests per day. However, this capacity had never been fully exploited due to lack of demand, added Mr. Orban. When Romania got hit by the fourth wave of the pandemic in October 2021 – which was also the deadliest one - only 25 per cent of the public testing capacity was used (Nistoroiu 2021), whilst Romanian citizens paid for tens of thousands of tests every day. In early February 2022, amidst the fifth wave, more than 100, 000 tests were carried out daily. Of these, roughly 20, 000 were paid by the state, whereas Romanian citizens paid for the rest (mai.gov.ro 2021). The state's testing capacity has improved throughout the pandemic, and the rapid antigenic tests were delivered to public schools in early November 2021. And yet the public testing capacity of 55, 000 PCR tests per day has never been fully exploited. In addition, it was rather difficult for rural inhabitants to have access to PCR tests, although they had the opportunity to use rapid antigenic tests.

Beside lack of financial resources, another institutional trait of a low capacity state resides in a rather underdeveloped policy capacity 'to coordinate more complex and socially balanced transformation agendas' (Bohle and Greskovits 2012, 221). Romanian authorities did not have a clear perspectives on the testing

capacity from the very beginning, which comes as the magnitude of the pandemic was unknown at the moment. In early April 2020, doctor Rafila maintained that 8, 000 to 10, 000 COVID-19 tests conducted daily would be “absolutely sufficient” for Romania (Dogioiu 2020). Then, in early May, Prime Minister Orban held that Romania’s testing capacity could increase up to 15, 000 tests per day (Șelaru 2020). Amidst the fourth wave of the pandemic, in October 2021, doctor Marinescu stated that Romanian authorities should test between 150, 000 and 200, 000 citizens per day in order to avoid a new lockdown (Nistoroiu 2021). In my view, indicative of Romania’s low capacity state has been the consistent gap between estimations, the potential testing capacity, and the number of daily tests that have been carried out and paid for by the state.

### **THE ISSUE OF MUTUAL DISTRUST IN ROMANIA**

This section addresses a central weakness of Romania’s political capacity, namely legitimacy. To unpack this, the section looks at mutual distrust. This is a process that involves low levels of vertical and horizontal trust, and translates into, first, citizens’ distrust in politicians and public institutions, and vice versa. And, second, in citizens’ distrust in other citizens. In a context characterized by rapid social change, mutual distrust may frustrate a given state’s “mobilization and extraction capacity” (Schmidt, Juneau 2012, 70) and the deployment of resources (Jaggers 1992).

Whereas citizens’ distrust in public institutions can be measured directly, political elites’ distrust in citizens needs to be measured indirectly by bringing into discussion specific coercive measures that were implemented in Romania during the state of emergency, that spanned March 15 to May 14, 2020. First, the Romanian government brought the army on the streets in the early phases of the state of emergency. Legally, such a measure was in line with military ordinance number 3, issued on March 24, according to which the government was entitled to resort to the army in order to respond to COVID-19. The army brought its contribution to build mobile hospitals and to guard strategic objectives. Colonel Spînu reassured the Romanian population that the fully-equipped 10,000 soldiers who were on the streets in late March had nothing to do with “the militarization of daily life” (Lazăr 2020). There is no specific data on Romanian citizens’ perceptions about the deployment of military troops during the state of emergency. Fact is that the abovementioned measure was a short-lived one and some military analysts requested the government to bring the army back into the barracks (Codiță 2020). Second, more than 300,000 Romanian citizens got fined for not complying with the regulations imposed by the government during the state of emergency. “The number represents more than one in every 100 inhabitants and is significantly higher than that in its European neighbors” (Gherasim 2020). In my view, there



was hardly a surprise that a significant number of citizens circumvented the law in a society with high levels of vertical and horizontal distrust. What came as a surprise, though, was the amount of the fines, that ranged from €415 to €4,150 (Gherasim 2020). The minimum fine of €415 is tantamount to a net monthly wage that is earned by roughly 36.2 per cent of the employed population in Romania (Gheorghe 2020). Also, most Romanians could not pay the maximum fine of €4,150, considering that less than 4 per cent of the employed population in Romania earn more than €1,500 per month (Gheorghe 2020). Third, Romanian authorities activated at the outset of the state of emergency a derogation included in Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights (Fati 2020). It is worth mentioning that only a handful of states chose to activate that specific derogation, that is, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia and the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, the Romanian government offered no clear-cut explanations about the limits of the derogation. Under such circumstances, at least theoretically, most human rights could have been suspended, except for the right to life, freedom from torture and freedom from slavery. Considering that the state of emergency did not necessarily entail such a measure, some commentators assessed it as “excessive and disproportionate” (Fati 2020). Fourth, all confirmed COVID-19 carriers, irrespective if they were symptomatic or asymptomatic, were forced to stay in a hospital during the state of emergency and even afterwards. Some asymptomatic carriers were forced to spend even two months in the same hospital before receiving two consecutive negative COVID-19 tests (Buciu 2020). After the state of emergency drew to a close, the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) declared that the Government cannot forcefully keep patients in a hospital based solely on emergency bills (Gidei 2020). In July 2020, the Government came up with a law, that was endorsed by a political majority in the Parliament, which coerced confirmed COVID-19 carriers to spend at least 48 hours in a hospital. It was also a short-lived measure.

In Romania, vertical trust reveals a population that is distrustful of its elites. Trust in public institutions with a political contour, i.e. the Government or the Parliament, has been traditionally low. In May 2019, trust in a PSD (the Social Democratic Party)-led Government was at 12.4 per cent, whereas trust in the Parliament and political parties was at 9.8 per cent and 8.9 per cent, respectively (Iarics.ro 2019). In September 2020, vertical trust continued to be low even though the country was run by a PNL (the National Liberal Party) - led Government. At that moment, trust in the Government was at 18 per cent (Pantazi R. 2020), whereas the average trust in national governments in the European Union was around 40 per cent in the summer of 2020 (Standard Eurobarometer 2020). One year and a half into the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the aftermath of a political crisis that erupted unexpectedly in September 2021, top political leaders hit an all time low in terms of trust. The-then Prime Minister was at 7 per cent, whereas the President of Romania, usually the most trusted politician, was at 14 per cent

(Mihăescu 2021). In addition to low levels of vertical trust, Romania has traditionally had low levels of horizontal or generalized trust. Conceptually, the distinction between particularized trust and generalized trust is synonymous with the one that Putnam made between bonding and bridging social capital (Uslaner 2003, 44; Uslaner 2015). Bonding social capital exists in particularistic networks and may create “clientelism and corruption” (Cox 2014, 2), while bridging social capital “connects groups and individuals in a wider society, and is therefore seen as a positive support for a strong civil society” (ibidem). A too dichotomous conceptualization (Wollebaek et al. 2012, 320) has created the impression of a zero-sum game interplay between particularized trust and generalized trust. In reality, particularized trust does not necessarily thrive at the expense of generalized trust. And yet generalized trust continues to be viewed as a precondition “to engage in cooperative behavior” (ibidem; Uslaner, 2003; Sztompka, 2003), as the strong identity of particularized trusters may hinder commonality (Uslaner, Conley 2003, 335).

Particularized trust has been traditionally developed in Romania. According to a 2004 survey, 67 per cent of respondents had low and very low confidence in ethnically different individuals. Also, 61 per cent of respondents did not trust individuals belonging to a different religion. “In Romania, only 25 percent of the population are fully trusting (by religion and ethnicity); in Moldova, it is just 13 percent” (Uslaner, Bădescu 2004, 225). Generalized trust hit another low in 2005, when only 10 per cent of Romanians held that they could trust other people (Bădescu *et al.* 2006). In 2019, 13 per cent of Romanian citizens stated that they trusted other people (Dumitrașcu 2020), which means that low levels of generalized trust stand for a path-dependent phenomenon. What accounts for Romania’s low levels of vertical and horizontal trust? The communist past (Linz, Stepan 1996), “the trap of inequality, corruption and low trust” (Rothstein 2011, 152) and perceptions of corruption (Zakaria 2012), which have constantly eroded Romanian citizens’ trust in public institutions and also in their conationals (Uslaner 2008, 2017), are some of the scholarly accounts. Cinpoș comes up with the concept of casual intolerance, that refers to “day-to-day speech practices which are highly-charged with intolerant views” (2013, 232). Political cruising and the constant incorporation of radical right ideas and also of political personalities who were salient members of the Great Romania Party (PRM) into the established parties account for the emergence of “casual intolerance” in Romania, according to Cinpoș.

In my view, the “middle-quality institutional trap” could be a more complex explanation for Romania’s persistent crisis of trust. Specifically, Romania’s low levels of vertical and horizontal trust could be accounted for by the institutional interplay among a low capacity state, a “democracy with adjectives” (Collier, Levitsky 1997) and a predominantly exclusive type of development (Teichman 2016). Of the abovementioned factors, Romania’s low capacity state may be the most important factor. According to an “institution-centered approach” (Rothstein

and Stolle 2008), institutions that usually breed social trust are not the representational ones, such as, legislative and executive institutions, for they are dominated by politicians. Social trust is usually produced by “the legal and administrative branches of the state responsible for the implementation of public policies” (Rothstein, Stolle 2008, 444). In other words, it usually takes a high capacity state to create social trust. In a low capacity state, representatives of the police, the judicial system and the social welfare institutions do not always behave impartially. As a result, growing distrustful citizens will engage progressively in trust-based networks, a practice that constantly fuels high levels of particularized trust. Then, a successful democracy manages to integrate citizens’ trust-based networks into politics (Tilly 2008) to a large extent. Looking at voter turnout for parliamentary elections, Romania seems to be facing a constant retreat of most of its citizens from politics: 39.20 (2008), 41.76 (2012), 39.49 (2016) and 31.84 (2020). Also, Romania’s mutual distrust could be accounted for by an exclusive model of development. In the early 1990s, less than 5 per cent of the Romanians could be labelled as members of the middle class (Brucan 1996, 80). Contemporary debates hold that the share of Romania’s middle class in the total population ranges between 1 per cent and 10 per cent (Orosz 2018), depending on the measuring stick one employs. It is already commonsensical that state capacity and the will of the elites have been instrumental for the emergence of the middle-class (Albertus, Menaldo 2018). By some institutional standards of the European Union, especially in terms of fiscal capacity, the development of public infrastructure and rule of law, the state in Romania could be considered a low capacity one. Political elites’ prevailing view on economic development has constantly aimed at institutionalizing cheap labor as a “comparative advantage” for the local economy (Ban 2014). At the same time, the political elites have pushed for the institutionalization of a market-friendly, liberal developmental state. This state has strengthened “general *administrative state capacities*” (Bruszt, Vukov 2017, 9) and turned the local automotive industry into a “case of successful transnationalization” (Vukov 2019, 4). Yet, the liberal developmental state has hardly reinforced Romania’s fiscal capacity (Ban 2021) which is redolent of a rather “dependent-developmental state” (Reinsbert *et al.* 2019, 1228). Fact is that the state-building process in Romania has also spawned “exclusionary development” (Vukov 2019) which is detrimental to 31.5 per cent of the employees (Guga 2021, 6), who are paid with a minimum wage of less than 300 euros per month.

### **A PANDEMIC-TYPE RECOMBINANT POPULISM**

This section looks at the phenomenon of persistent populism in Romania. This, in conjunction with mutual distrust, may have hindered institutional coherence, that is, the ability of different public institutions to find a common

denominator when dealing with a crisis situation. Lack of institutional coherence could affect a given state's political capacity to mobilize and deploy resources (Jagers 1992).

According to Dragoman, "recombinant populism" has coupled in Romania the most important elements of the anti-corruption narrative and the anti-communist narrative in order to produce an anti-elitist stance. Established parties have employed "recombinant populism" both as a "strategy" for tapping into a growing populist demand and "catalyzer" of populist narratives and actions (Dragoman 2020). The most salient feature of the pandemic-type "recombinant populism" that I bring to the fore has been its strong anti-institutionalism. This is an interesting turn considering that all centre-right governments have defended "the independence of non-elected bodies and depoliticised decision-making" (Kiss, Székely 2021, 9). Another trait of the pandemic-type "recombinant populism" is its anti-PSD penchant. This comes as no surprise as "anti-corruption populism" (Kiss, Székely 2021) had already morphed the anti-corruption narrative into an anti-PSD political discourse. The pandemic-type "recombinant populism" also includes some elements of a "blame the population narrative" which could be a feature of a low capacity state that in the context of rapid social change becomes – to paraphrase Claus Offe – more interested in itself (Borchert, Lessenich 2016, 38). Xenophobic populism came to an end in Romania in 2000. In the aftermath of the 2000 general election, the presidential candidate of the Great Romania Party (PRM) slipped into political obscurity. Corneliu Vadim Tudor never had the chance to become the president of the republic afterwards. Shafir holds that in the mid 2000's President Bănescu and the Liberal Democratic Party (PDL) brought the "postcommunist neopopulism" to Romania, that is, a penchant for "wild market", less democratic pluralism and anti-institutionalism. What Shafir deems as "postcommunist neopopulism" (2012, 430), Ban defines as "neoliberal populism" (2016, 70). That is, a strategy through which established parties increase pensions and public wages before the elections while simultaneously decreasing the tax burden on corporations. Thus, the institutional reproduction of the most disembedded economy in East and Central Europe continues unabated.

This section covers especially 2020. The Orban Government, controlled by PNL, replaced a PSD-led Government in October 2019. 2020 was an election year in Romania. Therefore the scapegoating tactic employed by the Orban Government should also be read as a strategy to cushion its electoral erosion during the COVID-19 crisis. The section includes statements of President Iohannis, former president of PNL, Ludovic Orban, Romania's Prime Minister between October 2019 and December 2020, Raluca Turcan, the-then Vice Prime Minister, Rareș Bogdan, current Vice President of PNL, and Nelu Tătaru, the-then Minister of Health. The above-mentioned political personalities were some of the most salient voices of PNL in 2020.

The anti-institutionalist narrative blamed the Constitutional Court of Romania (CCR) for not siding with the government during the state of emergency and thereafter. Between March 15 and May 14 2020, the Romanian government enforced the state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 300,000 Romanian citizens did not comply with certain provisos of the state of emergency and got fined. At the beginning of May 2020, CCR assessed that the sanctions imposed by the government during the state of emergency had violated the Constitution. The reason was that governmental sanctions lacked precision in defining the felony. In response to the decision made by the CCR, Prime-Minister Orban stated “I am sorry that I have to put it this way, but this is an invitation for every citizen to not abide by the law; it is an urge to anarchy and to an unjust behaviour towards the society and fellow human beings” (Jucan 2020). Later on, the CCR issued another resolution that declared unconstitutional a government bill that established the conditions under which COVID-19 carriers would be quarantined, isolated or sent to a public hospital. According to CCR, the Romanian Parliament had to come up with a specific law dealing with the administrative aspects mentioned above. Mr. Rareş Bogdan stated that “Now we can say that the CCR is subverting the Romanian state” (P. B. 2020). Mr. Bogdan’s narrative was also embraced by Ms. Raluca Turcan, according to whom “The CCR is subverting the functioning of the state and I believe that it is vital that we carry out a reform of the CCR in the shortest run” (digi24.ro 2020). In addition, Prime-Minister Orban urged the Romanian citizens to not comply with the resolutions issued by CCR. “It is my demand, my recommendation, my request for the citizens to not take into consideration CCR’s resolutions and to act in a responsible vein, as they have done it until now” (Tobias 2020). In counterpoint, the Romanian President, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, exhorted the Romanian citizens to abide by the resolutions issued by CCR. “CCR’s resolutions are mandatory, as well as the law and the Constitution” (Costea 2020). The anti-institutionalist narrative also chided the Romanian Ombudsman for not supporting the Government. On July 21, the Parliament adopted the so-called Law of quarantine and isolation. According to this law, even asymptomatic COVID-19 carriers were to be sent to a public hospital for 48 hours, even against their will. It was a short-lived measure. However, the Romanian Ombudsman contested the Law of quarantine and isolation on the grounds that it sharply contrasted with different resolutions issued by the European Court of Human Rights. Consequently, prominent members of PNL came up with a narrative according to which the Romanian Ombudsman acted against Romania’s interests. Prime Minister Orban opined that “the persistence in contesting fundamental laws that allow the Government and public health authorities to fight against the pandemic, to protect the people’s health and life, seems to me an attack against Romania’s fundamental interests” (Pantazi C. 2020). As a consequence, Prime-Minister Orban assessed the Romanian Ombudsman, Ms. Renate Weber, as siding with criminals. “Renate Weber behaves herself as the lawyer of those that

have braked the law and put at risk the other people's health" (H. I. 2020). Notably, in 2021, a PNL-led Government sacked Ms. Weber through a procedure that was deemed unconstitutional by CCR. As a result, CCR reinstated Ms. Weber shortly afterwards. A caveat could be useful at this point of discussion. After the social-democrats won the 2016 general elections, different political commentators have stated that PSD started controlling CCR, exactly as the liberals had done during the tenure of President Bănescu.

The scapegoating tactic also included an anti-PSD narrative, which has been a feature of "anti-corruption populism" in Romania. In this respect, the Government party has employed two sub-narratives. One that accused directly PSD of creating conducive conditions for the community spread of coronavirus. And another one that stressed the link between CCR and PSD. At the end of July, President Iohannis declared that "PSD has intentionally created a health crisis so that, in the end, to come and criticize the government for measures that could not have been adopted" (Iacob 2020a). By employing the same populist narrative, Ms. Turcan maintained that "PSD is the only political party in the European Union that has sided with the COVID-19 pandemic: it subverts any effort made by both the medics and public authorities to deal with the pandemic" (Paraschivoiu 2020). Mr. Valeriu Turcan accused PSD of collusion with foreign propaganda. "Cinical, unreformed, disoriented, with uneducated people at its very top and with many inside unsettled things, PSD has been the perfect amplifier of foreign propaganda" (Turcan 2020). Thus, by bringing its contribution to the public perception according to which SARS-CoV-2 does not exist, PSD has committed a "criminal political gesture" (ibidem). Another sub-narrative employed by the government party made the connection between CCR and PSD. Addressing the fact that CCR assessed certain sanctions imposed by the Government during the state of emergency as unconstitutional, Prime Minister Orban made the following statement. "CCR has behaved as a branch of the PSD" (Ionescu 2020). In the same optic, Ms. Turcan maintained that "now, when the government works around the clock for the public health, CCR went off on a populist slope in line with the discourse of PSD, that lacks any responsibility" (Constantinescu 2020). Mr. Rareș Bogdan also held that CCR was still dominated by practices that it had acquired during the "Dragnea era". "Exactly as during the Dragnea era, CCR proved itself to be a defender of criminals at the expense of honest people" (Jucan 2020).

It now turns to some elements of what appeared to be a "blame the population narrative" for not complying with the social distancing measures imposed by the Government. In July 2020, Health Minister Tătaru made the following statement. "How have we turned into the plague of Europe? By not complying with the rules or by instigating against abiding by the rules" (Iacob 2020b). It is noteworthy that the anti-corruption populism has had a civilizational dimension (Kiss and Székely 2021) that labeled PSD – and indirectly the rural people that tend to vote for PSD – as "red plague". Therefore, in the abovementioned statement it is not clear whether

Minister Tătaru chided the whole population or especially the PSD voters. Also in July 2020, Prime Minister Orban conditioned the imposition of new restrictions on the compliant behavior of the population. “We do not intend to enforce new restrictions, we do not want to take any measure that impacts the citizens’ life and creates negative consequences on the economy. This depends on the number of Romanians who abide by the medical protection rules” (V. M. 2020). Nevertheless, the apparent “blame the population narrative” was rejected by President Iohannis, who stated at the end of July that “the sociological studies that I have seen reveal that 90 per cent of you abide by the rules, get compliant, wear mask, keep the distance” (presidency.ro 2020). After the so-called Quarantine Law was adopted, Mr. Tătaru held that “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 impose the hospitalization, isolation and the treatment of patients in hospitals, then we will curb this transmission” (economica.net, 2020). In late August 2020, before the reopening of public schools, the Government could not provide a sufficiently developed testing capacity to constantly test the pupils. Consequently, Mr. Tătaru came up with the proposal that before sending their children to school parents should sign a declaration on their own responsibility. Absent such a declaration, children were not to be accepted in schools. After it had been posted on the website of the Health Ministry, the initiative was dropped and children were allowed go to school without a declaration signed by one of their parents. One year later, in November 2021, the Government started delivering rapid antigenic tests in public schools.

## CONCLUSIONS

The main novelty that this article puts forth is that certain administrative and political vulnerabilities of Romania have interfered with the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas the underfinanced public health system has clearly interfered with the “test, trace, isolate” strategy, mutual distrust and specific forms of persistent populism have had a bearing on the vaccination campaign. In early April 2022, roughly 42 per cent of Romanian citizens got vaccinated (cotidianul.ro 2022). A second novelty of the article lies in the attempt to add more conceptual traction to Fukuyama’s perspective, according to whom “state capacity, trust, and political leadership” have been key variables that made the difference among states dealing with COVID-19. To this end, I have resorted to Mazzuca and Munck’s “middle-quality institutional trap”, to which I have brought a minor conceptual update. In essence, the article has employed the “middle-quality institutional trap” as a metatheory. However, considering that state weakness, persistent political

volatility and socio-economic inequality are viewed as “interconnected factors” (Brinks *et al.* 2019, 50) of institutional weakness in Latin America, the question is whether the “middle-quality institutional trap” is more than a metatheory. More exactly, could the “middle-quality institutional trap” be employed as a causal mechanism that accounts for institutional weakness in Romania? This aspect needs further investigation. The article also has some limitations. First, the concept of “middle-quality institutional trap” has been devised to account for institutional weakness in Latin America. In my view, this concept can also be employed to examine administrative and political vulnerabilities in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). And yet, although different levels of institutional weakness could represent a common denominator among CEE and Latin American states, one can also find some important institutional differences. This article has not delved into these differences. Second, the article argues that mutual distrust and persistent populism have affected the “behavioral power” (Jagers 1992) of a state that has convinced less than half of its population to get vaccinated. Undoubtedly, mutual distrust and persistent populism reveal the weakness of Romania’s “software capabilities”, which are particularly responsible for good governance (Ayoob 1995). At the same time, however, the article has paid no heed to the impact that the conspiracy theories or other historical and institutional factors have had on the vaccination campaign. Moreover, considering that the article rests on qualitative research, it cannot argue that mutual distrust and persistent have been the most consequential – or the only – factors that account for the results of vaccination campaign in Romania.

The middle-quality institutional trap approach, which combines administrative and political vulnerabilities, may prove useful for researchers who are interested in exploring how ex-communist low to medium capacity states have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. As the article shows, crisis management studies tend to highlight administrative vulnerabilities and do not place emphasis on the political capacity of a given state. Political capacity is reliant on the quality of institutions and political leadership and refers to the ability of the state to mobilize and deploy resources in an effective vein. Besides differences in administrative capacities, variation in political capacities may have made the difference among states regarding the management of the COVID-19 pandemic. The empirical data provided by the article could be employed in comparative research of different states’ policies during the pandemic. Finally, considering that all political parties have resorted to populist narratives that have drawn on the COVID-19 crisis, the pandemic-type recombinant populism could be another avenue of research regarding the reproduction of Romania’s persistent populism in the context of rapid social change.



## REFERENCES

- ALBERTUS, M. and Menaldo, T. (2018). *Authoritarianism and the Elite Origins of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ALEXANDER, J. C., EYERMAN, R., GIESEN, B., SMELSER, N. J. and SZTOMPKA, P. (2004). *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- AYOOB, M. (1995). *The Third World Security Predicament. Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- AZAR, E. E. and MOON, C. (1988). "Legitimacy, Integration and Policy Capacity: The Software Side of Third World National Security." In *National Security in the Third World. The Management of Internal and External Threats*, edited by E. E. Azar and C. Moon, 77–101. College Park: University of Maryland.
- BAN, C. (2014). *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc*. Cluj-Napoca: Ed. Tact.
- BAN, C. (2016). *Ruling Ideas. How Global Neoliberalism Goes Local*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- BAN, C. (2021). "Dacă am colecta cât Bulgaria și Ungaria ...". *Libertatea.ro*. 2 February. Available at: <https://www.libertatea.ro/opinii/colectare-taxe-bulgaria-ungaria-bugete-florin-citu-anaf-3400055>, accessed 2 June 2021.
- BĂDESCU, G., COMȘA M. and SANDU, D. (coord.). (2006). *Eurobarometrul rural. Valori europene în sate românești*. București: Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă.
- BEL, G. (2012). *Infrastructure and the Political Economy of Nation Building in Spain, 1720–2010*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press.
- BERSCH, K., SÉRGI, P. and TAYLOR, M. M. (2017). "Bureaucratic Capacity and Political Autonomy Within National States: Mapping the Archipelago of Excellence in Brazil." In *States in the Developing World*, edited by M. Centeno, A. Kohli, D. J. Yashar and D. Mistree, 157–83. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- BOATCĂ, M. (2006). Knocking on Europe's Door: Romanian Academia between Communist Censorship and Western Neglect. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105 (3): 551–79.
- BOHLE, D. and GRESKOVITS, B. (2012). *Capitalist Diversity on Europe's Periphery*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- BORCHERT, J. and LESSENICH, S. (2016). *Claus Offe and the Critical Theory of the Capitalist State*. New York: Routledge.
- BRINKS, D. M., LEVITSKY, S. and MURILLO, M. V. (2019). *Understanding Institutional Weakness. Power and Design in Latin American Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BRUCAN, S. (1996). *Stâlpii noii puteri în România*. București: Ed. Nemira.
- BRUSZT, L. and VUKOV, V. (2017). Making states for the single market: European integration and the reshaping of economic states in the Southern and Eastern peripheries of Europe. *West European Politics* 40 (4): 663–687.
- BUCIU, L. (2020). "Povestea inexplicabilă a unui polițist din Suceava..." *mediafax.ro*, 26 May, available at: <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/povestea-inexplicabila-a-unui-politist-din-suceava-8-teste-de-covid-19-si-tratat-cu-sfantul-paracetamol-si-cuvioasa-vitamina-c-de-doua-luni-nu-scapa-de-virus-19184945>, accessed 13 January 2021.
- CAPANO, G. (2020). Policy design and state capacity in the COVID-19 emergency in Italy: if you are not prepared for the (un)expected, you can be only what you already are. *Policy and Society* 39 (3): 326–344.
- CAPANO, G., HOWLETT, M., JARVIS, D., RAMESH, M. and GOYAL, N. (2020). Mobilizing Policy (In)Capacity to Fight COVID-19: Understanding Variations in State Responses. *Policy and Society*: 1–24.

- CINPOEȘ, R. (2013). Extremism in Disguise: Casual Intolerance and Political Cruising in Romania. *Holocaust: Studii și cercetări* 6 (1): 228–251.
- CODIȚĂ, C. (2020). “Mai ușor cu armata ... pe străzi.” *Bursa.ro*, 27 March, available at: <https://www.bursa.ro/mai-usor-cu-armata-pe-strazi-47152937>, accessed 10 January 2021.
- COLLIER, D. and LEVITSKY, S. (1997). Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research. *World Politics* 49 (3): 430–451.
- CONSTANTINESCU, O. (2020). “Turcan: CCR cade pe panta populistă, în acord cu discursul PSD.” *newsweek.ro*, 25 June, available at: <https://newsweek.ro/politica/turcan-ccr-cade-pe-panta-populista-in-acord-cu-discursul-psd>, accessed 20 August 2020.
- Cotidianul.ro.2022. “Jurma: noi suntem nebunii în Occident.” 2 April, available at: <https://www.cotidianul.ro/jurma-noi-suntem-nebunii-in-occident/>, accessed 3 April 2020.
- COSTEA, A. (2020). “Iohannis îi dă o lovitură lui Ludovic Orban: Deciziile CCR sunt obligatorii.” *digi24.ro*, 8 July, available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/iohannis-ii-da-o-lovitura-lui-ludovic-orban-deciziile-ccr-sunt-obligatorii-1335189>, accessed 23 July 2020.
- COX, T. (ed.). (2014). *Civil Society and Social Capital in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*, New York: Routledge.
- CUMMINGS, S. N. and NØRGAARD, O. (2004). Conceptualizing State Capacity: Comparing Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. *Political Studies* 52: 685–708.
- Digi24.ro. 2020. “Turcan, după decizia CCR: Pentru majoritatea judecătorilor CCR, respectarea legii poate fi interpretată în interes politic.” 25 June, available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/turcan-dupa-decizia-ccr-pentru-majoritatea-judecatorilor-ccr-respectarea-legii-poate-fi-interpretata-in-interes-politic-1328683>, accessed 23 July 2020.
- DOGIOIU, Ioana Ene. 2020. “Când și cum se poate redeschide România. 1 Mai, posibil punct de cotitură.” *Ziare.com*, 11 April, available at: <https://ziare.com/stiri/coronavirus/cand-si-cum-se-poate-redeschide-romania-1-mai-posibil-punct-de-cotitura-interviu-1606342>, accessed, 2 June 2020.
- DRAGOMAN, Dragos. 2020. Save Romania Union and the Persistent Populism in Romania. *Problems of Post-Communism*: 1–12.
- DUMITRAȘCU, V. (2020). Towards a Study of the Methodology of Socio-Political System Vulnerability. *Revista română de sociologie* 30 (4): 355–372.
- DURANDIN, Catherine and PETRE, Z. (2010). *România post 1989*. Iași: Institutul European.
- Economica.net. (2020). “Tătaru: Sper să nu ne transformăm într-un stat polițienesc, dar populația trebuie să înțeleagă că e un moment dificil. Ce înseamnă pragul roșu.” 24 July, available at: [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), accessed 23 August 2020.
- FATI, Sabina. (2020). “România suspendă drepturile omului: urmează scenarii dure?” *romania.europalibera.org*, 20 March, available at: <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/rom%C3%A2nia-suspend%C4%83-drepturile-omului-urmeaz%C4%83-scenarii-dure-activarea-art-15-din-cedo-30500019.html>, accessed 9 January 2021.
- FUKUYAMA, F. (2014). *Political Order and Political Decay. From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- FUKUYAMA, F. (2020). “The Pandemic and Political Order. It Takes a State” *Foreign Affairs.com*, July/August, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2020-06-09/pandemic-and-political-order>, accessed 2 January 2021.
- GALLAGHER, T. (2010). *Deceniul pierdut al României. Mirajul integrării europene după anul 2000*. București: Ed. Humanitas.
- GANEV, V. I. (2005). Post-communism as an episode of state building: A reversed Tyllian perspective. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (4): 425–445.
- GANEV, V. I. (2013). Post-Accession Hooliganism: Democratic Governance in Bulgaria and Romania after 2007. *East European Politics and Societies* 27 (1).
- GEDDES, B. (1990). Building “State” Autonomy in Brazil, 1930–1964. *Comparative Politics* 22 (2): 217–35.

- GEDDES, B. (1994). *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America*. Los Angeles: University of California.
- GERRING, J. (2007). *Case Study Research. Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- GEORGE, A. L. and BENNETT, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- GHEORGHE, A. (2020). "Distribuția salariilor în țara noastră..." *wall-street.ro*, 8 January, available at: <https://www.wall-street.ro/articol/Careers/248017/distributia-salariilor-in-tara-noastra-1-din-4-romani-castiga-salariul-minim-iar-altii-iau-pana-la-120-000-de-lei-pe-luna.html#ref>, accessed 12 January 2021.
- GERASIM, C. (2020). "More than 300, 000 Romanians fined for breaking lockdown rules." *Newseu.cgtn.com*, 12 May, available at: <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-12/More-than-300-000-Romanians-fined-for-breaking-lockdown-rules-QqXR3HGncY/index.html>, accessed 1 April 2020.
- GIDEI, M. (2020). "CCR motivează decizia privind internarea obligatorie a pacienților COVID-19 ..." *mediafax.ro*, 1 July, available at: <https://www.mediafax.ro/social/ccr-motiveaza-decizia-privind-internarea-obligatorie-a-pacientilor-covid-19-veritabila-privare-de-libertate-19372126>, accessed 21 January 2021.
- GORA, A. and DE WILDE, P. (2020). The essence of democratic backsliding in the European Union: deliberation and rule of law *Journal of European Public Policy*.
- GRESKOVITS, B. (2015). The Hollowing and Backsliding of Democracy in East Central Europe. *Global Policy* 6, Supplement 1: 28–37.
- GUGA, Ș. (2021). *Salariul minim și traiul minim decent*. București: Syndex.
- GUSSI, A. and GOȘU, A. (2019). *Democrația sub asediu. România în context regional*. București: Corint Books, 2019.
- HANSON, J. K. and SIGMAN, R. (2011). Leviathan's Latent Dimensions: Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research. *APSA 2011 Annual Meeting Paper*.
- HAY, C. (2002). *Political Analysis. A Critical Introduction*. New York: Palgrave.
- HELLMAN, J. S. (1998). Winners Take All: The Politics of Partial Reform in Postcommunist Transitions. *World Politics* 50 (2): 203–234.
- HELLMAN, J. S., JONES, G. and KAUFMAN, D. (2003). Seize the state, seize the day: state capture and influence in transition economies. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 31: 751–773.
- H. I. (2020). "Orban: Renate Weber se comportă ca avocatul celor care au încălcat legea/Voi cere parlamentarilor PNL să studieze posibilitatea de a o demite." *hotnews.ro*, 19 June, available at: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-politic-24120443-orban-renate-weber-comporta-avocatul-ceilor-care-incalcat-legea-voi-cere-parlamentarilor-pnl-investigheze-posibilitatea-demite.htm>, accessed 21 August 2020.
- IACOB, B. T. (2020a). "Dedesubtul unui atac deșănțat: Iohannis forțează debarcarea lui Orban cu mâna PSD." *inpolitics.ro*, 30 July 2020, available at: [https://inpolitics.ro/dedesubtul-unui-atac-desantat-iohannis-forteaza-debarcarea-lui-orban-cu-mina-psd\\_18446188.html](https://inpolitics.ro/dedesubtul-unui-atac-desantat-iohannis-forteaza-debarcarea-lui-orban-cu-mina-psd_18446188.html), accessed 23 August 2020.
- IACOB, B. T. (2020b). "Tătaru: Am ajuns ciuma Europei." *inpolitics.ro*, 22 July, available at: [https://inpolitics.ro/tataru-am-ajuns-ciuma-europei\\_18446109.html](https://inpolitics.ro/tataru-am-ajuns-ciuma-europei_18446109.html), accessed 23 August 2020.
- IONESCU, V. (2020). "Ludovic Orban: CCR s-a comportat ca o filială a PSD." *cursdeguvernare.ro*, 6 July, available at: <https://cursdeguvernare.ro/ludovic-orban-ccr-s-a-comportat-ca-o-filiala-a-psd.html>, accessed 22 August 2020.
- JAGGERS, K. (1992). "War and the Three Faces of Power: War Making and State Making in Europe and the Americas." *Comparative Political Studies* 25 (1): 26–62.
- JOWITT, K. (1971). *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development: The Case of Romania, 1944-1965*, Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- JUCAN, F. (2020). "Rareș Bogdan: Politrucii, spăgarii și pupincuriștii să nu mai aibă ce să caute în cadrul CCR!" *QMagazine.ro*, 6 May, available at: <https://www.qmagazine.ro/rareș-bogdanpolitrucii-spagarii-si-pupincuristii-sa-nu-mai-aiba-ce-sa-caute-in-cadrul-ccr/>, accessed 2 June 2020.
- KAMRAVA, M. (ed.). (2016). *Fragile Politics. Weak States in the Greater Middle East*. London: Hurst & Company.

- KISS, T. and SZÉKELY, I. G. (2021). Populism on the Semi-Periphery. Some Considerations for Understanding the Anti-Corruption Discourse in Romania. *Problems of Post-Communism*: 1–14.
- KLARE, M. T. (2019). *All Hell Breaking Loose. The Pentagon's Perspective on Climate Change*. New York: Picador.
- LANGE, M. and RUESCHEMEYER, D. (eds.). (2005). *States and Development. Historical Antecedents of Stagnation and Advance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Larics.ro. 2019. 7 May, available at: <https://larics.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Raport-INSOCOP-Barometru-aprilie-mai-2019-1.pdf>, accessed 25 January, 2021.
- LAZĂR, M. (2020). "10.000 de militari au ieșit pe străzi..." *digi24.ro*, 25 March, available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/10-000-de-militari-au-iesit-pe-strazi-de-ce-acestia-sunt-echipati-in-tinuta-de-lupta-1281031>, accessed 10 January 2021.
- LEONTE, C. (2020). "România bate pasul pe loc la capacitatea de testare." *G4media.ro*, 13 October, available at: [România bate pasul pe loc la capacitatea de testare: Se fac în medie 14.000 de teste zilnic, același număr ca în luna iulie. Alte 9.000 de teste sunt efectuate în fiecare zi, la cerere \(g4media.ro\)](https://www.g4media.ro/romania-bate-pasul-pe-loc-la-capacitatea-de-testare-se-fac-in-medie-14000-de-teste-zilnic-aceiasi-numar-ca-in-luna-iulie-alte-9000-de-teste-sunt-efectuate-in-fiecare-zi-la-cerere-g4media.ro), accessed 5 January 2021.
- LINZ, J. J. and STEPAN, A. (1996). *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- LICĂ, Ș. (2020). "Epidemiolog francez cu origini române: A scăzut mortalitatea COVID-19 fiindcă acum cei mai mulți pacienți sunt tineri." *Adevărul.ro*, 24 August, available at: [https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/epidemiolog-francez-origini-romane-a-scazut-mortalitatea-covid-19-fiindca-cei-mai-pacienti-tineri-l\\_5f423afa5163ec42713e2edb/index.html](https://adevarul.ro/locale/cluj-napoca/epidemiolog-francez-origini-romane-a-scazut-mortalitatea-covid-19-fiindca-cei-mai-pacienti-tineri-l_5f423afa5163ec42713e2edb/index.html), accessed 29 August 2020.
- LUȚAC, R. (2021). "12 incendii la spitalele din România, în mai puțin de un an. Zeci de decese." *Libertatea.ro*, 1 October, available at: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/incendii-spitale-romania-sectii-ati-bucuresti-piatra-neamt-3762187>, accessed 15 November 2020.
- MAHONEY, J. and RUESCHEMEYER, D. (eds.). (2003). *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MALIȚA, M. and GEORGESCU, C. (2010). *România după criză. Reprofesionalizarea*. București: Compania.
- mai.gov.ro. 2021. available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ER1NXiS0bh0&list=RDSZQpVX8RIZY&index=10>, accessed 20 April 2022.
- MAINWARING, Scott, and PÉREZ-LINÁN, A. (2013). *Democracies and Dictatorships in Latin America. Emergence, Survival, and Fall*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- MAZZUCA, S. L. and MUNCK, G. L. (2020). *A Middle-Quality Institutional Trap Democracy and State Capacity in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MEI, C. (2020). Policy style, consistency and the effectiveness of the policy mix in China's fight against COVID-19. *Policy and Society*: 1–17.
- MELVILLE, A. and MIRONYUK, M. (2016). "Bad enough governance": state capacity and quality of institutions in post-Soviet autocracies. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32 (2): 132–151.
- MIGDAL, J. S. (2009). *State in Society. Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- MIHĂESCU, A. (2021). "Încrederea românilor în Iohannis s-a prăbușit la 14%, Cîțu a coborât la 7% – Sondaj Avangarde." *G4media.ro*, 27 October, available at: <https://www.g4media.ro/increderea-romanilor-in-iohannis-s-a-prabusit-la-14-citu-a-coborat-la-7-sondaj-avangarde.html>, accessed 3 December, 2021.
- MUNGIU-PIPPIDI, A. (2017). *În căutarea bunei guvernări. Cum au scăpat alte țări de corupție*. Iași: Ed. Polirom.
- NELISSEN, N. (2002). The Administrative Capacity of New Types of Governance. *Public Organization Review* 2: 5–22.
- NISTOROIU, A. (2021). "Testăm puțin. Câți oameni au COVID fără să știe?" *Libertatea.ro*, 23 October, available at: <https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/testam-suficient-3795837>, accessed 1 December, 2021.

O' DONNELL, G. (1993). On the State, Democratization and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Postcommunist Countries. *World Development* 21 (8): 1355–1369.

OFFE, C. (2015). *Europe Entrapped*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

OLTEANU, I. (2021). "Iohannis, după tragedia de la Constanța ..." *Spotmedia.ro*, 1 October, available at: <https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/eveniment/iohannis-dupa-tragedia-de-la-constanta-sunt-ingrozit-statul-roman-a-esuat>, accessed 17 November, 2021.

OROSZ, A. (2018). "Clasa de mijloc din România ... ." *rfi.ro*, 27 August, available at: <https://www.rfi.ro/social-105496-clasa-mijloc-romania-populatie-potrivit-standarde-globale>, accessed 19 April, 2022.

PANTAZI, R. (2020). "Sondaj IRES: Guvernul și Ministerul Sănătății sunt pe ultimul loc în topul încrederii..." *G4media.ro*, 27 August, available at: <https://www.g4media.ro/sonda-j-ires-guvernul-si-ministerul-sanatatii-sunt-pe-ultimul-loc-in-topul-increderii-parintilor-in-institutii-cu-privire-la-deciziile-de-incepere-a-cursurilor-80-din-parinti-vor-sa-fie-implicati-dir.html>, accessed 23 January 2020.

PANTAZI, C. (2020). "Ludovic Orban reacție dură după ce Renate Weber a atacat la CCR legea carantinei: Mi se pare un atac împotriva intereselor fundamentale ale României." *hotnews.ro*, 7 August, available at: <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-24217567-ludovic-orban-reactie-dura-dupa-renate-weber-atacat-ccr-legea-carantinei-pare-atac-impotriva-intereselor-fundamentale-ale-romaniei.htm>, accessed 23 August 2020.

PARASCHIVOIU, A. (2020). "Turcan nu iartă PSD: Singurul partid din UE care s-a aliat cu pandemia COVID." *Capital.ro*, 13 August, available at: <https://www.capital.ro/turcan-nu-iarta-psd-singurul-partid-din-ue-care-s-a-aliat-cu-pandemia-covid.html>, accessed 23 August 2020.

Presidency.ro. (2020). 30 July, available at: <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/declaratia-de-pres-a-sustinuta-de-presedintele-romaniei-domnul-klaus-iohannis1596113428>, accessed 20 January, 2021.

P. B. (2020). "Rareș Bogdan după decizia privind carantina și izolarea: Putem spune că CCR subminează statul român." *digi24.ro*, 5 July, available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/rares-bogdan-dupa-decizia-privind-carantina-si-izolarea-putem-spune-ca-ccr-submineaza-statul-roman-1333676>, accessed 30 July 2020.

RADU, B. (2018). Influence of Social Capital on Community Resilience in the Case of Emergency Situations in Romania. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 54 (5): 73–89.

RĂVDAN, F. (2020). "Câți medici lucrează la DSP în județe. Gădea a răbufnit. Cine face anchete epidemiologice?" *DCNEWS.ro*, 15 July, available at: [https://www.dcnews.ro/cati-medici-lucreaza-la-dsp-in-judete-gadea-a-rabufnit-cine-face-anchete-epidemiologice\\_759853.html](https://www.dcnews.ro/cati-medici-lucreaza-la-dsp-in-judete-gadea-a-rabufnit-cine-face-anchete-epidemiologice_759853.html), accessed 15 August 2020.

REINSBERG, B., KENTILEKENIS, A., STUBBS, T. and KING, L. (2019). The World System and the Hollowing Out of State Capacity: How Structural Adjustment Programs Affect Bureaucratic Quality in Developing Countries. *American Journal of Sociology* 124 (4): 1222–1257.

ROTHSTEIN, B and STOLLE, D. (2008). The State and Social Capital. An Institutional Theory of Generalized Trust. *Comparative Politics* 40 (4).

ROTHSTEIN, B. (2011). *The Quality of Government. Corruption, Social Trust, and Inequality in International Perspective*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

SCHMIDT, B. C. and JUNEAU, T. (2012). Neoclassical realism and power. In *Neoclassical Realism in European Politics. Bringing Power Back In*, edited by A. Toje and B. Kunz, 61–78. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

SHAFIR, M. (2012). Neopopulismul în zodia comunismului. In *Populismul contemporan*, edited by S. Gherghina, S. Mișcoiu, S. Soare, 401–444. Iași: Ed. Institutul European.

STĂNESCU, I. and ZAMFIR, C. (coords). (2015). *România la răscruce. Opțiuni pentru viitor*. București: Pro Universitaria.

STOICA, C. A. (2018). *România continuă. Schimbare și adaptare în comunism și postcomunism*. București: Ed. Humanitas.

STOLOJAN, T. (2020). *Decizii, controverse, mituri în economie și politică, 1961–2020*. București: Ed. Academiei Române.

- ȘELARU, C. (2020). "Ludovic Orban: Noi diagnosticăm în funcție de necesități." *Stiripesurse.ro*, 4 May, available at: VIDEO Ludovic Orban, explicații HALUCINANTE în ziua în care România a făcut doar 3.560 de teste: 'Noi diagnosticăm în funcție de necesități' - Stiri pe surse - Cele mai noi stiri, accessed 24 January 2021.
- TEICHMAN, J. A. (2016). *The Politics of Inclusive Development. Policy, State Capacity, and Coalition Building*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- THIES, C. G. (2004). State Building, Interstate and Intrastate Rivalry: A Study of Post-Colonial Developing Country Extractive Efforts, 1975-2000. *International Studies Quarterly* 48 (2):53–72.
- TILLY, C. (2008). *Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- TIERNEY, K. (2014). *The social roots of risk. Producing disaster, promoting resilience*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- TOBIAS, A. (2020). "Premierul Ludovic Orban: Recomandarea mea către cetățeni e să nu țină cont de deciziile CCR." *Ziarulfinanciar.ro*, 4 July, available at: <https://www.zf.ro/politica/premierul-ludovic-orban-recomandarea-mea-catre-cetateni-e-sa-nu-tina-19389885>, accessed 23 July 2020.
- TURCAN, V. (2020). "Joncțiunea propagandei străine cu PSD." *Ziare.com*, 18 August, available at: <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/actualitate/politica/iohannis-ii-da-o-lovitura-lui-ludovic-orban-deciziile-ccr-sunt-obligatorii-1335189>, accessed 23 August 2020.
- USLANER, E. M. (2003). Varieties of trust. *European Political Sciences Summer*: 43-49.
- USLANER, E. M. and CONLEY, R. S. (2003). Civic Engagement and Particularized Trust. The Ties That Bind People to Their Ethnic Communities. *American Politics Research* 31 (4): 331–360.
- USLANER, E. M. (2015). Social and Political Trust. In *The International Encyclopedia of Political Communication*, edited by Gianpietro Mazzoleni, New York: Wiley-Blackwell.
- USLANER, E. and BĂDESCU, G. (2004). Legacies and conflicts. The challenges to social capital in the democratic transition. in Bădescu, Gabriel and Eric Uslander (eds.) *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, London: Routledge.
- USLANER, E. M. (2008). *Corruption, Inequality, and the Rule of Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- VUKOV, V. (2019) European integration and weak states: Romania's road to exclusionary development. *Review of International Political Economy* 27, 5: 1041–1062.
- V. M. (2020). "Avertismentul lui Orban..." *Cluj24.ro*, 23 July, available at: <https://cluj24.ro/avertismentul-lui-orban-ne-gandim-la-toate-mijloacele-posibile-ca-sa-limitam-raspandirea-15517.html>, accessed 15 November, 2020.
- WHITE, D. and HERZOG, M. (2016). Examining state capacity in the context of electoral authoritarianism, regime formation and consolidation in Russia and Turkey. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16 (4): 551–569.
- ZAKARIA, P. (2012). Is corruption an enemy of civil society? The case of Central and Eastern Europe. *International Political Science Review* 34 (4): 351–371.
- WOLLEBAEK, D., LUNDÅSEN, S. M. and TRÄGÅRDH, L. (2012). Three Forms of Interpersonal Trust: Evidence from Swedish Municipalities. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 35 (4): 319–346.