

THE POLITICAL RESOCIALIZATION OF ROMANIAN MIGRANTS

Gabriel Bădescu, Daniela Angi

Abstract. *In this article, we evaluate political culture among Romanians living abroad. Romanians are the most mobile nationality group among EU-28 countries, and the number of Romanian citizens voting abroad has been increasing over the last several elections, playing a significant role in deciding the winners of the last two presidential elections. By drawing from survey data collected through a Voting Advice Application (VAA) instrument shortly before the 2012 Romanian legislative elections, we found support for those approaches that see generalized trust as being not easily changeable by socialization experiences. At the same time, our analyses show that migrants have more favourable attitudes towards minority out-groups. Migrants are also found to assess more positively the activity and prerogatives of international organizations (EU, IMF).*

Keywords: migration; political culture; political socialization

The current refugee crisis and the surrounding disputes at the level of public reactions revealed the need to reconsider the extent to which East Central European countries have liberal political cultures. “Why has liberalism, once a rallying cry for pro-European leaders from Warsaw to Sofia and a condition built into the EU’s demanding pre-accession acquis, suddenly gone missing when it is needed most?” ask James Dawson and Seán Hanley (2015). Their assertion is that liberalism of East Central European political mainstream has been an “ersatz product”, since it has always failed to stand up for ideals of an inclusive plural society – unless directly mandated by EU conditionalities.

These assessments add details to a broader picture provided by Larry Diamond on how democracy has evolved over the last decades in the world. He observes that, after more than 30 years of expansion, democracy has entered in a global recession for most of the last decade, and “there is a growing danger that the recession could deepen and tip over into something much worse”, as a result of both

an accelerating rate of democratic breakdown, and of a decline of the quality of democracy in a number of large and strategically important emerging-market countries (Diamond 2015:144).

Sharun Mukand and Dani Rodrik suggest that the differential fortunes of liberal democracy in Western Europe and the developing world, including ex-communist countries, are related to the nature of dominant cleavages at the time of the social mobilisation that ushered in democracy. In their view, in the West, the transition to democracy occurred as a consequence of industrialisation at a time when the major division in society was the one between capitalists and workers, whereas transition in most developing nations had identity cleavages as the main fault line, a context that has proved particularly inimical to liberal democracy (Mukand and Rodrik 2015).

A consequence of their finding is that democratic transitions in East Central European countries are expected to stay problematic in the absence of powerful external stimuli.

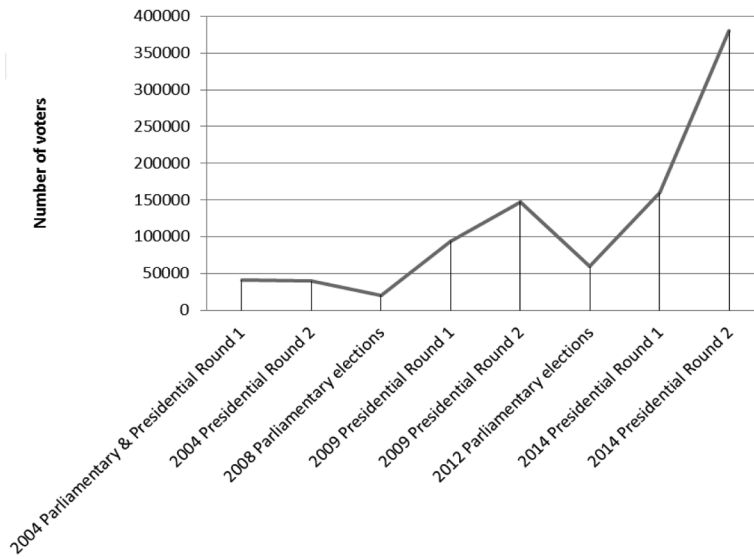


FIGURE 1. NUMBER OF ROMANIAN VOTERS WHO VOTED ABROAD DURING 2004-2014

Is migration a factor that spurs development of democratic culture or rather a process that contributed to stagnation of freedom and democracy in these countries?

Most of the ex-communist countries have sizeable parts of their population involved in international migration, a phenomenon that has the potential to provide a context of significant social learning. Romanians are the most mobile nationality group among EU-28 countries (Eurostat 2015). Of the nearly 51 million immigrants in the European Union, approximately one-third (17.1 million) come from other EU countries, and Romanians make up the plurality of this group. Romanian migration has been a mass phenomenon since the fall of the communist regime in 1989. As many as one-third of Romanian households have a member who resides or has resided abroad, some of whom follow a circulatory pattern (Jurvale 2011: 2-4). Common destinations are Italy with approximately 1,081,000 Romanian citizens, Spain with just over 728,000 and Germany with 245,000.

In addition, the number of Romanian citizens voting abroad has been increasing over the last several elections, reaching about 380,000 during the second round of the 2014

presidential elections (Figure 1). Moreover, it has been claimed that both 2009 and 2014 presidential elections victors were decided by Romanian citizens voting abroad (Burean and Popp 2014).

Drawing from survey data collected through a Voting Advice Application (VAA) instrument shortly before the 2012 Romanian legislative elections, we evaluate the effects of migration on cultural variables that are relevant for democratic processes, such as generalized trust and attitudes toward minority groups. In doing so, we consider migration to be a process that exposes people to new contexts, culturally diverse and often characterized by newness. At the same time, we acknowledge the acculturation effect that migration may have on newcomers, in adjusting their values/attitudes to the contexts of the host countries.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGING POLITICAL ATTITUDES AMONG MIGRANTS

Generalized trust is the faith you place in people who you do not know. Trusting strangers increases the possibilities that groups will overcome collective action problems and en-

courages cooperative behavior among people who do not otherwise have a relationship (Coleman 1990; Newton 1999; Putnam 1993; Uslaner 2002). In addition, generalized trust has been shown to serve as a bond that enhances social cohesion, bringing and keeping people together with a sense of community (Marschall and Stolle 2004; Putnam 2000; Uslaner 2002; Woolcock 2001). Generalized trust contributes to a host of other desirable outcomes such as encouraging of norms of reciprocity, tolerance, and civic morality, all of which are necessary features of good governance under democratic institutions (Sullivan and Transue 1999; Letki 2006). Beyond good citizenship, improvements in group task orientation and completion are additional dividends associated with generalized trust (Colquitt, Scott, and LePine 2007). As populations become increasingly mobile, generalized trust offers attributes to soften the edges of potential social conflicts arising from relocation (Uslaner 2000).

In addition to influence on trust, migration is predicated to influence conservatism and authoritarian attitudes by several distinct mechanisms.

First, the migration experience implies the immersion in contexts characterized both by **unfamiliarity** and by configurations of diversity (cultural, institutional, economic, demographic) that are different from those in the country of origin. In turn, unfamiliarity may generate uncertainty, anxiety and the associated need to find coping strategies.

Several studies explore the impact of threat (real or perceived threat) on the development of political attitudes. For example, Jost et al (2007: 989) tested the appropriateness of the *uncertainty-threat model of political conservatism*, showing that “uncertainty avoidance (e.g. need for order, intolerance of ambiguity, and lack of openness to experience) and threat management (e.g. death anxiety, system threat, and perceptions of a dangerous world) each contributes independently to conservatism (vs liberalism).” In this approach, the *uncertainty-threat model* claims that “psychological needs to manage uncertainty and threat are associated with political orienta-

tions.” (Jost et al 2007: 992) This approach highlights the tensions generated by the prospects of social change (as opposed to stability and the preservation of status quo), claiming that “even for people who are relatively disadvantaged by the status quo, the ‘devil’ they know often seems preferable to the ‘devil’ they do not know.” (Jost et al 2007: 990)

Migration is also expected to influence attitudes to the extent that migrants perceived themselves as being part of **disadvantaged groups**. The response of individuals who perceive themselves as being part of groups placed at relative disadvantage towards other groups has been revealed – by experimental studies – to manifest in their tendency to slide towards authoritarian attitudes. (Thorisdottir 2008)

Migration tends to provide **contexts that are culturally more diverse** than the place of origin.

Studies that look at the impact of diversity on attitudes often revolve around the changes at the level of prejudice, trust and in how individuals place themselves in relation to out-groups.

Along these lines, the preeminent theoretical models are those postulated by the conflict theory (Bobo 1983), constrict theory (Putnam 2007) and contact theory (Pettigrew 1997). Both conflict and constrict theory posit negative effects of diversity on relations between groups, predicting the increase of prejudice, decrease of trust and inter-group tensions, whereas contact theory opens the possibility for diversity to exert positive effects, mediated by interaction with the out-groups (Schmid, Hewstone, al Ramiah 2015)

The empirical support for either perspective is fragmented. For example, Putnam’s constrict approach has been tested on data from European countries (Gesthuizen, van der Meer, Scheepers 2008), examining the effects of ethnic diversity on various measures of social capital, concluding that the association between ethnic fractionalization and social capital indicators is spurious, thereby refuting the postulation of constrict theory.

Other studies that discuss the exposure to diversity in relation to threat warn against

the hasty assumption that presence of high diversity will result in stronger authoritarian attitudes. (Andersen & Evans 2004) Thus, if presence of out-groups generates threat, it may well be the case that “individuals in countries that are heterogeneous may be generally more open-minded because there is not a perceived single way of life to preserve, while individuals in countries that are relatively more homogenous may be more interested in preserving the ‘national’ way of life, resulting in attitudes that are less tolerant of out-groups and non-traditional ways of life.” (Andersen & Evans 2004: 7)

Research that seeks to explain authoritarian leanings in political attitudes by resorting to individuals’ psychological attributes include approaches drawing on the *social dominance theory*. Social dominance theory is based on the idea that “all human societies tend to be structured as systems of group-based social hierarchies” (Sidanius & Pratto 2004: 315), and further argues that “[G]roup-based social hierarchy ...refers to that social power, prestige, and privilege that an individual possesses by virtue of their ascribed membership in a particular socially constructed group such as “race”, religion, clan, tribe, lineage, linguistic/ethnic group, or social class.” (Sidanius & Pratto 2004: 316)

Individuals’ ranking on the social dominance orientation (SDO) is likely to be influenced by their membership to specific groups, socialization experience and socio-demographic attributes, personality and predispositions (e.g. empathy). (Sidanius & Pratto 2004) When applied to rejection of specific groups (ethnic minorities, for example), “SDO is proposed to lead to prejudice via perceptions of the world as a competitive place in which high SDO individuals are motivated to achieve dominance.” (Craig & Richeson 2013: 418)

Research on American respondents (Pratto et al 1994) showed that SDO is positively associated with support for chauvinistic policies and negatively associated with support for gay rights and women rights. Also, a higher level of SDO positively correlates with punitive orientations, specifically with support for death penalty.

Five categories of factors that influence SDO are discussed by Pratto et al (2006): group position (people in dominant positions, defined, for example, by socioeconomic status, have higher levels of SDO than those in lower positions); the social context (societies have dynamic configurations of hierarchical relations between groups and levels of SDO are assumed to vary as the hierarchy between groups fluctuates; also SDO is influenced by the salience of group identities); personality features (which may account for individuals’ SDO relative stability across situations); gender (controlling for other factors, men are more likely to have higher SDO); socialization (“socialization into specific doctrines [...]multicultural experiences, observing the competence of members of denigrated groups, and education” (Pratto et al 2006: 294))

Migration can also be a powerful source of **acculturation**. Dinesen and Hooghe (2010) tested the hypothesis of acculturation in the case of immigrants who choose as host countries states from Western Europe, asking whether immigrants adjust their level of trust to that of natives. The authors find indications that acculturation does indeed take place, and that this effect is more visible for second generation migrants. This, in turn, may suggest that longer exposure to the host country context has a stronger impact on the change of attitudes. On the other hand, that effect is not homogenous across countries as it depends on the gap between levels of trust from home and destination countries. A similar effect is confirmed by a later study (Dinesen 2012), who found respondents from low-trusting societies to adjust their level of trust as a result of their migration to the high-trusting societies of Northern Europe, thereby supporting the experiential hypothesis on the development of trust.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ROMANIAN MIGRANTS AND RETURNING MIGRANTS

Existing studies that look at the effects of migration generate a mixed picture about the impact of moving or living abroad on a

range of attitudes and values among returning migrants. On survey data from 2002-2004, Badescu (2004) finds no differences between Romanian returning migrants and Romanian non-migrants in terms of political culture (e.g. political trust, support for democratic values). Careja and Emmenegger (2012) show, on survey data collected from respondents in ten EU candidate states in 2002, that returning migrants differ, at attitudinal level, from non-migrants, only when the host country is an established democracy.

On samples of Romanian migrants who reside in Italy and Spain surveyed in 2008, Sum and Badescu (2014) found that specific configurations of the migration experience impact on their level of generalized trust. In particular, situations of perceived hostility in the host country, the perception of diversity and migrants' illegal status tend to decrease individuals' trust in strangers.

In a nutshell, from existing research no decisive conclusion concerning the impact of migration on political attitudes of migrants can be drawn. There are strong indications that the political attitudes of migrants differ from the ones of non-migrants.

Unfortunately, similarly to previous quantitative studies on re-socializing effects of migration, our research design relies on cross-sectional data, therefore there is a possibility that any differences we observe between migrants and non-migrants are due to self-selection.

However, we argue that this potential danger is not a major concern for two reasons. First, Dinesen (2012, 503) shows that Italian, Polish, and Turkish migrants to EU countries are not systematically different from non-migrants from the same country of origin during the same time period, and there is no reason to believe Romanians are different in this respect. Secondly, starting 2004, Romanian migration has become a mass phenomenon, covering all relevant social categories of people (Lazaroiu & Alexandru 2005).

DATA AND MODELS

Data were collected during November 10 and December 9, 2012, by a Voting Advice Application (VAA) instrument¹. Among the 16,107 respondents, 641 (4%) declared that their living place is outside Romania. In addition, the application allowed us to identify the country where the respondent was when filling the online questionnaire. This way, we found that 2396 respondents were outside the country (15%).

There are a number of shortcomings associated with collecting data through online surveys, most of which relate to the restrictions of generalizability and sometimes also with the quality of the collected data. Bryman (2012: 675) notes the limitations that arise from obtaining, in online surveys, answers from respondents who are more homogenous compared to the composition of the overall population. Moreover, online respondents are likely to differ from subjects interviewed in conventional manners, since Web users often do not resemble non web users along individual characteristics, including attitudes. As far as the quality of data is concerned, one particular difficulty has been noted in the case of items for which the answers are placed on scales (such as Likert). Fricker et al (2005: 390) compared answers in online survey research to those collected via telephone and found that online respondents are more inclined to offer "less differentiated responses to batteries of questions that offered the same set of response options."

As explained above, since our analysis uses cross-sectional data, one possible limitation is that self-selection mechanisms account for part of the differences we expect to find between migrants and non-migrants. At the same time, previous research (Dinesen 2012; Lazaroiu & Alexandru 2005) supports the prospect that self-selection's effects will be limited, particularly as Romanian migration covers all relevant social categories.

¹ Data were collected by the Center for the Study of Democracy, Romania, and the Center for Research on Direct Democracy, Switzerland

Table 1 shows the distribution of votes during 2012 legislative elections in Romania (Senate), voting preferences for the VAA respondents, and voting preferences for the VAA respondents who were abroad. Differences between distributions of votes cast abroad and preferences of respondents who answered the questionnaire while abroad suggest that this online survey underrepresented the category of migrants who are relying less on internet for getting political information and more on TV channels that broadcast in Romania, such as OTV, owned by the leader of PPDD (People’s Party Dan Diaconescu).

The independent variables are *Migrant* (1 – respondent declared he/she lives abroad, 0 – respondent declared his/her place of residence in Romania) and *Abroad* (1 – respondents’ IP placed him/her abroad, 0 – IP placed him/her in Romania). Table 2 represents the relationship between Migrant and Abroad, suggesting a cumulative phenomenon where those who stay abroad for shorter periods of time are more likely to be identified by *Abroad* (value

1), whereas those who stay longer are identified by *Migration* (value 1). If this assertion is correct, then we expect that socializing effects of exposure to living outside the country are stronger in the case of Migrant than in the case of Abroad.

Data show that there is no clear difference between those living abroad and the respondents residing in Romania, in terms of generalized trust. There is a slight tendency for those who declare that live abroad to be more trustful, but the correlation is not statistically significant ($p = 0.08$) (Table 3). The effect of migration on trust is even weaker in a multivariate analysis that includes level of education and age ($\beta = 0.02, p = 0.30$). At the same time, since only 13% of the sample answered the question on trust, it is difficult to extrapolate the result to the entire sample, and even harder to the entire population.

In addition to the question on trust, the 2012 VAA survey had a battery of 30 questions that estimate various political attitudes. Out of them, five estimate views on minority

TABLE 1
VOTING DISTRIBUTION DURING 2012 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA (SENATE),
VOTING PREFERENCES FOR THE VAA RESPONDENTS AND FOR
THE VAA RESPONDENTS WHO WERE ABROAD

	Votes abroad 2012 (Senate)		VAA (%)	VAA abroad (%)
ARD	24100	40.2	39	53
USL	17310	28.9	50	35
PPDD	13700	22.9	3	4
Others	4800	8.0	8	8
	59910	100	100	100

TABLE 2
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VARIABLES MIGRANT AND ABROAD

		Migrant		Total
		0	1	
Abroad	0	12626	38	12664
	1	1472	550	2022
Total		14098	588	14686

groups² and three questions address respondents' views on the role of international institutions³. Table 4 shows the correlations

between these six variables and the two variables that refer to the place of living (Abroad, Migrant).

TABLE 3
THE BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN GENERALIZED TRUST AND LIVING ABROAD (ABROAD, MIGRANT)

		Abroad			Total	
		.00	Abroad	Migrant		
How much do you trust people you meet on the street?	Very much		33	3	0	36
			1.7%	1.4%	.0%	1.6%
	A lot		456	69	23	548
			23.7%	31.2%	26.1%	24.5%
	A bit		1044	96	53	1193
			54.2%	43.4%	60.2%	53.4%
	Very little/not at all		393	53	12	458
			20.4%	24.0%	13.6%	20.5%
Total		1926	221	88	2235	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

TABLE 4
THE BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND LIVING ABROAD. A POSITIVE CORRELATION INDICATES HIGHER SUPPORT FOR THE STATEMENT AMONG THOSE WHO COMPLETED THE QUESTIONNAIRE ABROAD (ABROAD) OR AMONG THOSE WHO STATED THEY LIVE ABROAD (MIGRANT)

	Abroad Gamma	Migrant Gamma
Homosexuals should have the right to express themselves freely in public.	0.17***	0.30***
The death penalty should be reintroduced for heinous crimes.	-0.18***	-0.30***
All Hungarians should be obliged to learn Romanian.	-0.13***	-0.18***
Minorities should have the right to education exclusively in the mother tongue, including at university.	0.07***	0.10**
The Roma ethnic population of cities should live isolated from the rest of the community.	-0.19***	-0.24***
External loans from institutions such as the IMF are a good solution to crisis situations.	0.07**	0.11**
Romania should cede more decision-making power to the EU.	0.13***	0.27***
International partners (such as the U.S. or EU) have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of Romania when they feel there is a threat to democracy.	0.14***	0.19***

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$

² We consider that the question on death penalty reflects in part views on how delinquents should be treated.

³ Each question has six response categories, ranging from "completely disagree" (1), to "completely agree" (5); and "no opinion" (99). Responses that were "no opinion" were considered missing values.

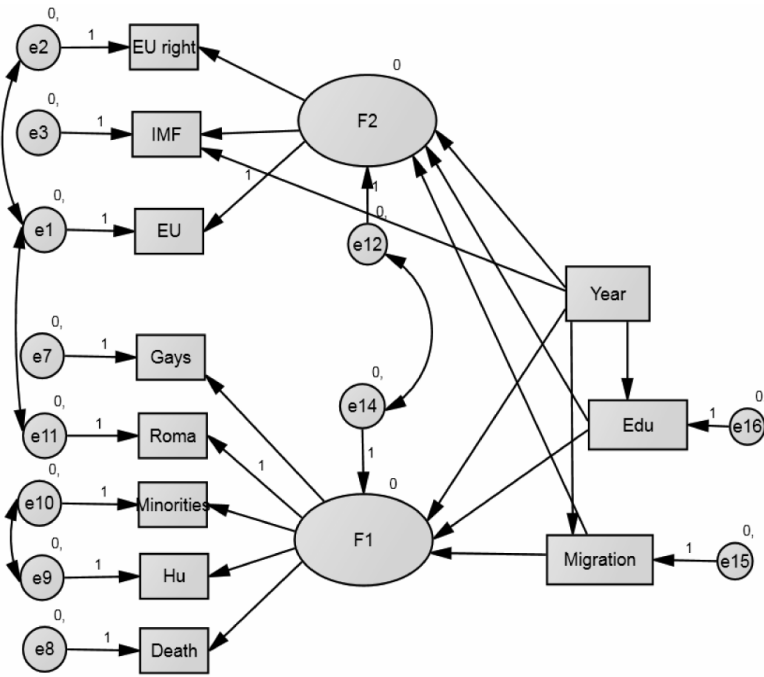


FIGURE 2. STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL OF MIGRATION EFFECTS ON ATTITUDES TOWARDS MINORITIES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

TABLE 5
REGRESSION WEIGHTS IN SEM

		Migration (Mig.)		Abroad (Abr.)			
		Estimate	Std. estimate	Estimate	Std. estimate	P	
F1	<--- Mig./Abr.	-.375	-.112	***	-.228	-.109	***
F2	<--- Mig./Abr.	.333	.076	***	.181	.066	***
F1	<--- Year	-.005	-.138	***	-.005	-.102	***
F2	<--- Year	-.011	-.046	***	-.011	-.149	***
F1	<--- Edu	-.207	-.165	***	-.208	-.157	***
F2	<--- Edu	.095	.023	*	.096	.110	***
EUpower	<--- F2	1.000	.688		1.000	.687	
IMF	<--- F2	.837	.540	***	.841	.545	***
EUdecision	<--- F2	1.222	.659	***	1.229	.655	***
Death	<--- F1	1.000	.640		1.000	.638	
Hu	<--- F1	.588	.469	***	.590	.470	***
Minorities	<--- F1	-.423	-.316	***	-.425	-.317	***
Roma	<--- F1	.695	.509	***	.699	.511	***
Gays	<--- F1	-.673	-.566	***	-.673	-.536	***
IMF	<--- Year	-.012	-.128	***	-.012	-.142	***
Model Fit		CFI = 0.945	TLI = 0.897	RMSE=0.039	CFI = 0.942	TLI=0.912	RMSEA = 0.039

The bivariate analyses show a clear tendency for respondents who live abroad to have more positive attitudes to minority groups, as well as more positive views on the role of international institutions.

We use structural equations models (SEM) for the multivariate analyses of how living abroad influences these attitudes. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the conceptual model that includes our variables of interest⁴.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of our analyses suggest that living abroad does not impact on individuals' generalized trust. This finding provides support for those approaches that see generalized trust as being rather stable in time and therefore not easily changeable by socialization experiences.

At the same time, our analyses show that migrants have more favourable attitudes towards minority out-groups: Hungarians, Roma, homosexuals and delinquents. In this case, we may interpret these differences as reflecting an effect of exposure to contexts that handle diversity differently than the home country (at both practical and discursive levels). This way, the migration experience translates in a social learning experience. Further, we may assume that migrants found themselves, in the host country, in the position of a minority out-group that sought inclusion and acceptance from the majority population. To the extent that empathy (identification) is a mechanism that extrapolates one's own experience to external groups, we may explain why migrants tend to be more sensitive towards the situation of ethnic minorities.

Migrants are also found to assess more positively the activity and prerogatives of international organizations such as EU and IMF. In this respect, research links the attitudes towards EU, including the support

for extending EU's decision-making power, to standpoints that citizen develop towards migration policies, minorities' rights, among others. (Boomgaarden et al 2011; Leconte 2010) In this light, the overall assessments offered by migrants towards international institutions align with their comparatively more positive attitudes towards the rights of minority out-groups. In addition, to the extent that migrants attach supra-national institutions like EU with perceived benefits generated by the opportunity to live and work abroad, their positive assessments may also be grounded in a utilitarian approach on the matter.

It is not clear to what extent these results can be generalized to the entire population of Romanian citizens who live abroad. Most likely they describe aspects of political resocialization among migrants who stay longer abroad and who are more technologically sophisticated than average migrant. Even so, it is an important result given the high propensity of these categories of migrants to be politically active.

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⁴ The model represented in Figure 2 includes Migration as the main independent variable. We estimate a similar model where Abroad is the main independent variable.

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Gabriel Bădescu is a professor of political science and director of the Center for the Study of Democracy, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, str. Minerilor 85
✉ badescu@fspac.ro

Daniela Angi is researcher at the Center for the Study of Democracy, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, str. Minerilor 85
✉ angi@fspac.ro