

This is an Accepted Manuscript of a book chapter edited by Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes H. de Vreese published by Routledge as *Populist Political Communication in Europe* on July 26, 2016. The book is available online at: <http://www.tandfebooks.com/doi/book/10.4324/9781315623016>

## 25. Romania. Populist Ideology Without Teeth

*Nicoleta Corbu, Delia Balaban-Bălaș, and Elena Negrea-Busuioac*

### Introduction

A quick glance at the political transformations that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain shows that many of the countries in the region share a set of distinct features, such as political instability generated by the radicalization of the left-right divide of the political spectrum, instability of governments, an increase in people's mistrust of politicians and institutions, politicians' more or less successful attempts to tamper with justice, and the rise of populism (either populist movements or populist parties) at the electoral expense of traditional parties (Krastev, 2007; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001, 2007). Post-1989 Romania is no exception; all these features may be used to characterize the country's politically troubled itinerary in the wake of the overthrow of Ceaușescu's dictatorship. Sold as "an alternative politics" (Shafir, 2008, p. 429) or a provider of simplified, Manichean solutions to the intricacies of democracy, populism has been a constant presence in Romanian politics, accompanying the country's long journey through transition.

### Research on Populism in Post-Communist Romania

Interest in analyzing populism in Romanian politics has surged significantly after 2000, when one of the most renowned Romanian populists, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the leader of the Greater Romania Party (PRM), managed to enter the presidential runoff of that year. He did not win the race, but his performance definitely sent a warning sign both to other (mainstream) parties and to political pundits and scholars about how powerful the populist discourse really is during elections. Thus, the literature on populism in Romania has been enriched by a significant number of papers dealing with populism during presidential (Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Pop-Eleches, 2001) and parliamentary elections (Downs & Miller, 2006; Gherghina, 2010; Gherghina & Soare, 2013).

When faced with the challenge of defining populism in Romania, the majority of authors acknowledge the dangers of working with a "notoriously vague term" (Canovan, 1999, p. 3), a slippery concept (Taggart, 2000) that leaves room for many interpretations in shifting contexts (Mișcoiu, 2010; Șandru, 2012). Nonetheless, when discussing populism in Romanian politics, many scholarly works on the topic position themselves mainly within two of the three attempts to conceptualize populism. Romanian populism is treated either as a "thin"-centered ideology (Mudde, 2004) lacking conceptual substance (see Cinpoeș, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001, 2007; Shafir, 2008) or as a communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), which is used successfully by leaders of both populist and mainstream parties (see Gherghina & Soare, 2013; Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007). We found only one paper that explicitly views populism as "a mere political strategy that is based upon the bond with the people" (Koban & Danetiu, 2013, p. 280), which neo-populist elites exploit in order to acquire and maintain power. An original contribution to the literature consists of a typology of the "species" of the populist "genre" in post-communist Romania (Soare, 2010). The author identifies five such species, which she labels as *national-paternalist populism*, *anarchic populism*, *radical populism*, *regional episodic populism* and *messianic populism*. These categories characterize

the manifestations of populism (led by populist movements or by populist parties) in the recent post-1989 history of the country.

According to Soare (2010), populism was first introduced in post-communist Romanian politics by the National Salvation Front (FSN) as early as 1990. Created by some members of the marginalized communist elite, the party has always struggled to deny its links to the Communist Party and Ceaușescu's regime. The national-paternalist populism promoted by the National Salvation Front is characterized by glorifying revolutionary solidarity, promoting conspiracy attitudes along the lines of "nation under threat" (e.g., fear of losing Transylvania), avoiding the implementation of democratic institutions and economic reforms, and promoting violence as a means of resolving both internal and external conflicts (Soare, 2010, p. 102). The National Salvation Front has undergone several metamorphoses throughout the years, culminating in its current incarnation as the Social Democratic Party (PSD), presently the largest mainstream party in Romania. In the early 1990s, when Romanian society was dominated by social and political instability, several uprisings by miners took place, which were condoned by the National Salvation Front. Lacking any form of institutionalization and strongly dependent on their leader's charisma, the miners' riots were a form of anarchic populism, characterized by fear and violence. The third species of populism described by Soare is the radical populism of the Greater Romania Party. This party is the oldest populist party of post-1989 Romania, whose ideology shares many features with populism in Western Europe (see next section). Another species identified is regional episodic populism, which characterizes the political trajectory of the now-dissolved Romanians' National Unity Party (PUNR). In its short political career, this party promoted a nationalist discourse focusing almost exclusively on the vilification of the Hungarian minority from Transylvania. Finally, a relatively recent species of populism is that of the New Generation Party (PNG) and its leader, Gigi Becali. The messianic populism of the New Generation Party demands an urgent moral and spiritual renewal of the Romanian society, with Becali posing as the savior of the country. The five species of populism identified and described by Soare (2010) are representative of early transformations taking place in post-communist Romania. We will concentrate on those populist parties that have actually succeeded in Romanian politics (such as the Greater Romania Party and the New Generation Party), deliberately leaving aside peripheral parties, grassroots movements, or protest-driven actions galvanized by populist ideas and populist leaders.

Populism in Romania mimics Western European and Latin American models, whose features have been described extensively by the literature (Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014). Key elements of populism such as people-centrism and anti-elitism (particularly, opposition to the governing political elite), and an anti-establishment, dichotomous view of society are present in Romanian politics, too. Additionally, Romanian populism is characterized by a lack of an ideological cleavage between the right and the left and a strong, Christian-Orthodox, reactionary attitude, reflected in an aggressive discourse. What is interesting about Romanian populists is that "they can bridge together elements of the Left (the need for social assistance, solidarity, redistribution, anti-oligarchy, etc.) with elements of extreme Right (nationalism, religious ethos, defending family and traditions, etc.) without sounding incoherent" (Nabăr, 2010, p. 313).

Generally, the discourse of Romanian populism is defined by strong negativity (Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007; Șandru, 2012; Shafir, 2008); populists basically reject everything but offer no alternatives. Often, the populist rhetoric is offensive and filled with invectives, ironies,

sarcasm, and even personal attacks. However, contrary to their counterparts in Western Europe (and even in some ex-communist countries, of which Hungary and Poland stand out), populist parties in Romania are broadly in favor of the European Union and do not blame the European Union and European leaders for many of the wrongdoings of the country (Florian & Climescu, 2012). Neither populists nor mainstream parties have ever overtly promoted an anti-EU discourse, since Romanians are generally Euro-enthusiasts and supporters of European integration. EU membership is viewed as a symbolic “return to Europe” (Kopecky & Mudde, 2002, p. 298), to a common destiny with Europe, which Romania has been deprived of by Communism. Unlike many populists in Western Europe, Romanian populists do not promote Euroskeptic messages and do not see the European integration project as a threat to Romania; rather, given the Romanians’ high level of trust in the European Union, they see it as an opportunity that they can use to capitalize politically and electorally. Another Western populist feature missing from the Romanian context is Islamophobia, as the analysis to follow of populist discourse will show.

The literature on Romanian populism is predominantly descriptive, drawing mainly on populist discourse and populist rhetoric analyses. Usually, these studies are based on a single case investigation, contrastive analyses being very rare (for an exception, see Sum, 2010). The methods described in this type of paper are diffuse, consisting of “monitoring” the different media used by populist leaders to disseminate their messages (e.g., TV speeches by politicians, political platforms, blogs, Facebook accounts, etc.). With some notable exceptions (such as Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007; Sum, 2010), there are very few studies that discuss the results of empirical research on populism-related topics. Clearly, this area is one to which future work could contribute substantially. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the parties labeled as populist and whose activity and performance could be assessed empirically through case studies, content analysis, or other quantitative and qualitative methods.

Populist parties have been a constant presence in Romanian politics, despite the fact that they have rarely acceded to power. In this section, we shall provide a brief outline of three established populist parties in Romania that have actively participated in national political life by entering highstake electoral competitions. However, these parties are not currently the only advocates of populist ideas and themes in Romanian society. Officially unrecognized parties, such as the Everything for the Country Party (PTPȚ) and political movements like The New Right (ND), are perhaps the most prominent representatives of right-wing extremism in Romania, especially among young, educated segments of the population, whose substantial presence on the Internet cannot easily go unremarked. Despite their absence from recent electoral politics (The New Right has never actually participated in any post-communist elections due to the courts’ rejection of its application to become a party), the Everything for the Country Party and The New Right continue to spread extremist, nationalist, fascist, racist, and xenophobic discourse in Romanian society. In an attempt to counterbalance their lack of political expression, both the Everything for the Country Party and The New Right are actively involved in grassroots activities (boot camps, countermarches, commemorative events), inspired by the Iron Guard, Romania’s inter-war far-right Legionary Movement (for a more detailed discussion of right-extremist movements in Romania, see Cinpoș, 2013).

Probably the most renowned populist party in Romania, described as such in virtually all the literature (Cinpoș, 2013; Mudde, 2007; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Sum, 2010), is the Greater Romania Party, whose fame is almost entirely due to the charisma of its leader, Vadim Tudor.

Stemming from the old communist *nomenklatura*, the Greater Romania Party is the longest-lasting populist party of post-1989 Romania. It entered the Romanian parliament for the first time in September 1992. In fact, Vadim Tudor himself was one of Ceaușescu's most trusted ideologues, fulfilling the role of "court poet" and ghost writer. The Greater Romania Party lacks internal substance and a clearly defined ideological stance; it easily juggles far-right elements (who adhere to strong anti-Semitism, ethnic nationalism, and an overemphasis on traditions and religious values) and far-left elements (who favor nationalization of national economy and industry). The most memorable event in the party's history was definitely the 2000 parliamentary and presidential electoral success (it became the largest opposition party), culminating with Vadim Tudor's performance as runner-up in the race for the highest position in the state. Apparently, this episode has overwhelmed and exhausted both the party and its leader, setting the scene for a slow but sure decline. The party participated in all ensuing elections, winning fewer and fewer votes. The latest 2014 elections for the European Parliament resulted in total failure; the Greater Romania Party did not manage to secure a single seat.

The history of the next party is intertwined with that of the Greater Romania Party. Rumor has it that the New Generation Party (PNG; since 2006, the New Generation Party–Christian Democrat [PNG-CD]) has been helped in its rise by the largest mainstream party in Romania, the Social Democratic Party, in an attempt to undermine the Greater Romania Party's success. Both PNG-CD and the Greater Romania Party are characterized as radical right parties (Sum, 2010) assuming an exclusionary ultra-nationalism with powerful anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-Hungarian, and homophonic overtones. PNG-CD is led by Becali, a self-made millionaire, avid for political gain and recognition. Becali is a former shepherd turned businessman turned politician, owner of Romania's all-time greatest football team. Comparisons to Berlusconi's history with Forza Italia are almost unavoidable; both are "filthy rich" businessmen, owning successful and iconic national football teams, and both aspire to political success.

Shafir (2008) characterizes PNG and its leader as a case of "neo-populism from below" (p. 433), seeking to come to power by whatever means. Although PNG-CD has never met the electoral threshold (which is set at five percent in Romania) and therefore has not won any seats in Parliament, Becali has been a member of both the Romanian and European parliaments, due to his candidacy on the lists of other parties—the National Liberal Party (PNL) and Greater Romania Party. What PNG-CD lacked in ideology and political content, Becali made up for in xenophobic and racist discourse, demagoguery, and invectives thrown left and right, all these greatly appealing to the viewers of his theatrical TV appearances. However, it seems that both PNG-CD and its leader have lost their momentum in Romanian politics. Party members have scattered across the entire political spectrum, many of them joining the newly created People's Party, Dan Diaconescu, which will be presented below. Becali has been recently released from jail, having served a three-year sentence for bribery.

Founded in 2010 by Dan Diaconescu, owner of a tabloid-style TV station called OTV, People's Party Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD) has taken advantage of the difficult times faced by the Greater Romania Party and PNG-CD and has managed to rapidly accede to power by scoring surprisingly well in the 2012 parliamentary elections (it won 68 seats in both houses). People's Party Dan Diaconescu is a left-wing populist party, lacking a platform and a clear-cut ideology, while, at the same time, sharing some features of right-wing extremism (e.g., strong anti-homosexual views), without necessarily meeting the criteria to be

included in the latter category (Cinpoș, 2013, p. 176). The party advocates direct democracy, in which the sovereign people decide their own future and the future of the state. This type of populism resembles Hugo Chávez's media populism. From behind the TV screen, the host and politician Dan Diaconescu promises the eradication of poverty in Romania, the destruction of the corrupt political class, and the instauration of a people's dictatorship. Despite a promising political career in the Romanian political "big leagues," which the 2012 elections might have predicted, People's Party Dan Diaconescu's momentum seems to have already been lost; the party is currently torn by internal struggles, many members have migrated to other parties, especially to the Social Democratic Party (the largest party from the governmental coalition), in search of easy and rapid gains. Diaconescu is currently in jail, serving a five-year sentence for blackmail.

We conclude our overview of populist parties and leaders in Romania with the former president of Romania, Traian Băsescu, who did not shy away from populism whenever this suited his interests. Băsescu has taken any chance to appeal to people and rail against the rampant moral and economic corruption of elites. As opposed to Becali's neo-populism from below, Shafir (2008) characterizes Băsescu's political career as "neo-populism from above" (p. 442), seeking to preserve power by any means. The former president is an excellent communicator and a skilled debater who knows how to "maintain a permanent contact with the citizens and enjoy a superficial dialog with the electorate rather than with other political elites" (Koban & Danetiu 2013, p. 288). We should note that Romanian populist parties are in decline as the results from recent parliamentary and presidential elections show. With the exception of People's Party Dan Diaconescu, none of the other parties have representatives in the Romanian parliament. Furthermore, none of them (People's Party Dan Diaconescu included) won any seats in the European Parliament, due to their weak results in the 2014 European Parliamentary elections. One explanation may be that many features of populist discourse have been hijacked by mainstream parties in the hope that repeated appeals to the people and denunciations of corrupt governing elites will resonate with voters' mind and hearts and bring the parties more votes. Furthermore, Romanian populist parties tend to be entirely dependent on their leaders. Once the leader underperforms or even exits the political scene (or is forced to exit, as has been the case of Becali and Diaconescu because of their imprisonments), the party starts to dismantle, running the risk of dissolution.

### **Populists Actors as Communicators**

A great deal of the literature has analyzed populist politicians and their communication styles (Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007; Chiru, 2010; Marinescu, 2010; Florian & Climescu, 2012; Gherghina & Soare, 2013). Most authors agree that populist leaders are charismatic individuals and that their charisma is essential to their success and the success of their parties. The charismatic populist par excellence is Vadim Tudor, the leader of the Greater Romania Party. Bragging about himself (his erudition, his vast knowledge of history and literature, his Christian-Orthodox upbringing, etc.), threatening others (particularly minority groups such as Jews, Hungarians, non-Christians, or homosexuals), or denouncing elite's or obscure groups' persecutions of him and his party are staples of Vadim Tudor's discourse. His preference for sophisticated language (as an indication of his education) is in contrast to Becali's discourse, which is simplistic, direct, and riddled with grammatical errors. Vadim Tudor is an excellent orator; he is spectacular on TV and is therefore feared by his opponents in direct confrontations (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001; Iețcu-Fairclough, 2007).

Another distinctive feature of the populist discourse in Romania is the use of symbols and myths. The discourse of virtually all populists and mainstream parties is impregnated with

symbols of nationalist, anti-Semitic, racist, and violent rhetoric (Şandru & Condur, 2001; Soare, 2010). Pervasive are the myths of the savior, of the nation under siege, and of the country's modernization (Chiru, 2010; Florian & Climescu, 2012; Gherghina & Soare, 2013). Gigi Becali, "the comically loquacious leader of the PNG" (Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007, p. 36), abuses the myth of the savior in his discourse. Self-proclaimed "warrior of the light" and defender of the Cross, Becali posed as the savior of the people and of the entire country, a chosen apostle on a God-given mission to redeem Romanians, "his people," and make Romania shine like the holy sun in the sky (Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007, p. 36). His discourse appeals to the army and the Church—the top two most trusted institutions in Romania—and, consequently, to people who trust them. At this point it is worth mentioning that the discourse of populist and mainstream leaders has never been condemned by the Romanian Orthodox Church. On the contrary, the Church has more or less overtly encouraged the ethnic- and religion-based populist movements in Romania (Cinpoş, 2013). Its attitude toward minority groups has inspired the rhetoric of many populists, among whom Becali is one of the most striking examples.

A preference for an unsophisticated, common language "of the people" (Jiglău, 2010) can be observed in the discourse of the most populist mainstream leader, Băsescu (Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007; Koban & Danetiu, 2013; Shafir, 2008). Băsescu's agile use of colloquial conversation, humor, and commercial advertising (Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007) has helped him win two mandates as president of Romania. In the 2004 presidential elections, Băsescu had an excellent online campaign of the blitzkrieg type. The campaign revolved around anti-elite discourse, and all messages included the slogan *Arde-i pe corupţi!* (Smack the corrupters!) and the image of a chili pepper (the text of the slogan is a pun; chili pepper is *ardei* in Romanian).

His constant appeal to the people and aggression against the corrupt elites and media tycoons have propelled him to the Ivy League of Romanian populists. His strategic maneuvering of the "choice between the two communists" moment in the 2004 campaign is memorable: "What kind of curse is there on this people that in the end it comes to a choice between two former communists? Between Nastase and Basescu" (Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007, p. 45). His manner of talking, mixing formal and informal forms of address, shifting from one register to another, engaging in informal, personal conversation has won him voters' sympathy.

Băsescu's aggressiveness is matched only by Vadim Tudor's; Băsescu has threatened to "execute with my own hand any minister suspected of corruption" (Shafir, 2008, p. 454), while Vadim Tudor has threatened to put his opponents "in jail and machine-gun them" (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001, p. 237).

Furthermore, populist discourse in Romania is generally organized around the "us" versus "them" dichotomy (Gherghina & Soare, 2013; Ieţcu-Fairclough, 2007). Vadim Tudor's discursive rage targets mainly the Jewish mafia, the secessionist Hungarian ethnics, Gypsies, and homosexuals, who all seek to destroy the country from within. Becali's aggressiveness is directed at Jews, Gypsies, gays, and lesbians, and whoever else is not devout Christian Orthodox. Having more business-oriented interests, Dan Diaconescu's populist rhetoric builds on opposition to the corrupt governing elite—the "fleecers"—who have impoverished the people.

Copilaş (2013) shows that populist discourse represents an attempt at fragmentation of the social field through binary oppositions: "diligent" versus "lazy," "thieves," and "beggars";

“friends of civilization” versus “supporters of barbarians,” “the entrepreneurs of hate.” The “guilty ones” for Romania’s errors and misfortunes are the former communists and the perpetuation of their mentality, not necessarily corruption and inefficient economic measures (Copilaș, 2013). Specific aspects of the binary discourse are related to the vague and unspecified features of the in-group, whereas the out-group has negative qualities that are explicitly and clearly stated. Thus, the in-group is defined, *ex negativo*, as an upside-down mirror of the out-group (Florian & Climescu, 2012).

To conclude, both populist and mainstream party leaders rely heavily on populist discourse during their activities, and with some exceptions, their communications share similar topics (e.g., appeal to people, binary oppositions, and anti-elite positioning). The use of myths and symbols, or messianic and nationalistic flavors, however, are features of the discourse of established populist leaders rather than mainstream politicians.

### **The Media and Populism**

The relationship between the media and populist politics in Romania is rarely discussed in the literature. There are few references to the media coverage of populism and to the role that the media play in promoting populist discourse (Florian & Climescu, 2012). Inasmuch as the media are discussed, they are seen as fostering populist discourse by offering an arena where populists convey their messages to the people (Copilaș, 2013). Media help populists construct reality through labeling and ambiguity; they help them build a symbolic logic through which people identify with the leader and perceive the leader as being “one of them.” Thus, people have the feeling of being co-authors of the discourse (Marinescu, 2010). Therefore, the role played by the media, if any at all, generally refers to a sort of emancipation of the population—a “cognitive emancipation” stimulated by new forms of mass communication (Marinescu, 2010). This emancipation has led to a loss of trust in political elites and to the consolidation of people’s belief that they would do better at governing than the elites.

An important aspect referred to in the literature is the media’s impact on the success of populist parties and leaders. Many authors argue that high levels of exposure of populist leaders positively influences their success (Gherghina & Soare, 2013; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001). However, high exposure does not necessarily entail acceptance and support by the media for populist parties and leaders. Sometimes, the media change their position and act more as enemies of populism and populist leaders than allies. For example, in the runoff to the 2000 presidential elections, Vadim Tudor was the sole target of attacks from all mainstream media, which feared the negative consequences of his victory on freedom of speech (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2001).

The electoral success of the People’s Party Dan Diaconescu may be partly explained by its exclusive exposure through the TV channel owned by the party leader (Gherghina & Soare, 2013). A skilled and versatile media entrepreneur, Dan Diaconescu has chosen to use a tabloid-style TV station to convey his message and gain visibility and popularity. His choice has been attentively calculated to match the profile and the demands of the target audience. Tabloid media are more likely to echo people’s dissatisfaction with politics and their anti-elite attitudes, thus allowing People’s Party Dan Diaconescu’s populist discourse to feed directly from the source, i.e., from Romanians dissatisfied with politics. Tabloid journalism is a form of media populism (Krämer, 2014) that in this case provides valuable support to a populist party and its leader. Vadim Tudor and Becali were also frequently present in the tabloid media, especially in tabloid-type TV shows, through which they aimed to capitalize on their appeal to the masses.

We should also mention that recent political and media transformations in Romania seem to have led to a media populism that can be found in some TV channels that initially supported certain parties but are now becoming more and more populist themselves—that is, they use populist strategies and communication styles for their own purposes (Krämer, 2014). This avenue may be an interesting one for further research on populism and the media in Romania.

### **Citizens and Populism**

There is little systematic knowledge in the literature on the profile of supporters of populist parties in Romania. However, one study provides information on the base support for two established populist parties, the Greater Romania Party and PNG-CD (Sum, 2010). Drawing on data from Romanian barometer polls, Sum (2010) has been able to build demographic profiles of the supporters of each of these two radical-right parties (as he labels them): PNG-CD voters are less educated and younger. The Greater Romania Party voters are older, male, ethnic Romanians (ethnicity is not a statistically significant variable in the case of PNG-CD), male Romanians. With regard to voters' occupational status, the industrial class is heavily represented in the case of the Greater Romania Party, whereas those who are inactive in the labor force are more likely to vote for PNG-CD (Sum, 2010, p. 23).

A general feeling of alienation in the population is largely exploited by populist parties (Soare, 2010), both at a social level (by offering an apparent solidarity) and at an economic level (by feeding the distrust in the government, portrayed as corrupt and incapable). Following the same logic, Șandru & Condur (2001) argue that there is a huge expectation of demagogic and populist discourse in a system going through a democratization process, confronting itself with many economic problems.

Citizens' support for populist movements is also triggered by the latter's constant appeal to emotions. Populist leaders, such as Bănescu, make use of emotional arguments rather than logical ones (Marinescu, 2010); people want a "personal relationship" with the leader, and they want the leader to speak their language, to be familial and familiar, and not to be a voice of impersonal reason.

Fear of out-groups—of a generalized "them"—is another determinant of support for populism, for which different leaders find specific "evils." Specific out-groups emerged in the discourse of some populist leaders. The idea of Romanians as a pure race can be traced in the discourse of the leader of the People's Party Dan Diaconescu (Florian & Climescu, 2012), who contrasts the Romanians to "the mafia of the Roma population" and their general negative influence. Depictions of religious minorities as enemies are to be found in Becali's discourse, while stigmatization of the Hungarian minority is a staple of Vadim Tudor's discourse.

It is difficult to distinguish specific characteristics of populist supporters. Populists are usually recognized as legitimated and voted in by socially heterogeneous groups who are going through identity crises and find it difficult to deal with the inconsistency of present moral and political values (Marinescu, 2010). These people have no answers to their personal or group fears. Tired of looking for answers, they welcome re-interpretations of their own problems and fears. They feed on words and promises that give them hope for better personal lives. At the same time, the Romanian electorate is volatile (Nabăr, 2010), which makes it easier for populist messages to exert their influence.

## Summary and Recent Developments

Populism in Romania is a phenomenon in its own right, being a constant presence in Romanian post-1989 politics. In this chapter, we have analyzed the characteristics of populism in Romania with regard to the definitions and conceptualizations of populism in the literature in the field. We have also offered an overview of the parties and politicians that scholars have labeled populist, and of their political careers.

Romanian populism shares many features with the populism of Western Europe (e.g., a people-centric, anti-elite, anti-establishment philosophy, as well as a Manichean view of the society), while displaying some particularities, such as left-right ideological ambivalence, strong religious reactionary discourse, and the absence of Islamophobia. Unlike their Western relatives, Romanian populist parties have not been especially successful in recent elections. Despite being skilled communicators and having a good relationship with the media, populists' ability to attract voters has decreased over the last decade. As mentioned earlier, many features of the populist discourse (especially the condemnation of corrupt governing elites and the exaggeration of Romanian-ness and of Romanians' destiny) have been hijacked by mainstream parties and politicians and used to appeal to people and attract their support. Populists' electoral failure may also be partially explained by established populist leaders' loss of charisma (such as that of the Greater Romania Party's leader, Vadim Tudor, who has become less visible and less influential on the political scene) or even by a loss of economic power and political influence as a result of imprisonment for bribery (Becali) or blackmail (Diaconescu). However, these developments do not mean that they have lost all resources to potentially vigorously come back in the future. Populist parties' dependence on their leaders may be detrimental to their long-term prospects, but these parties have great potential for renewal. New populist leaders may appear who are more skilled in discourse and more adjusted to the changes in the Romanian political landscape. There is also a possibility, however remote, that populism might fill in for the absence of any other distinct, fully fledged, ideological directions in current Romanian politics.

Furthermore, populist discourse does not seem to suffer from the decline of populist parties. There are lots of populist features in the discourse of mainstream parties and even in the discourse of mainstream media that go insufficiently explored in the literature. Future research on populism may take this avenue and provide a thorough analysis of media populism in Romania. Additionally, research on the effects of populist messages on citizens' political behavior, opinions, attitudes, emotions, and propensity to vote would add valuable insights into the profile of voters for populist parties. Together, these two endeavors will shed more light on the multilayered manifestations of populism in Romania.

## References

- Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political Studies* 47(1), 2–16.
- Chiru, M. (2010). Doar mâna întinsă care spune o poveste primește ... votul. O analiză a retoricilor electorale populiste din România 2004–2008. In S. Gherghina & *Romania* 337
- S. Mișcoiu, (Eds.). *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 159–190). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Cinpoes, R. (2013). Right-wing extremism in Romania. In R. Melzer & S. Serafin (Eds.), *Right-wing extremism in Europe: Country analyses, counter-strategies and labor-market oriented exit strategies* (pp. 160–197). Berlin, Germany: FES.

- Copilaș, E. (2013). Simbolistica politică românească: între populism și cinism? *Sfera Politicii*, 174, 107–120.
- Downs, W. M., & Miller, R. V. (2006). The 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania. *Notes on Recent Elections/Electoral Studies*, 25(2006), 409–415.
- Florian, A., & Climescu, A. (2012). *Mesaje populist-naționaliste în campania electorală pentru alegerile parlamentare din 2012*. Bucurest, Romania: Institutul Național pentru Studiarea Holocaustului din România “Elie Wiesel.” Retrieved from [http://www.fes.ro/media/pdf/Studiu\\_Populism.pdf](http://www.fes.ro/media/pdf/Studiu_Populism.pdf).
- Gherghina, S. (2010). Organizarea partidelor populiste și succesul lor electoral în România post-comunistă. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 233–268). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Gherghina, S., & Soare, S. (2013). *From TV to parliament: Populism and communication in the Romanian 2012 elections*. Retrieved from <http://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2370006>.
- Hawkins, K. A. (2010). *Venezuela's chavismo and populism in comparative perspective*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ietcu-Fairclough, I. (2007). Populism and the Romanian ‘Orange Revolution’: A discourse analytical perspective on the presidential election of December 2004. *Studies in Language & Capitalism*, 2(1), 31–74.
- Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties’ discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 319–345.
- Jigău, G. (2010). Știm despre ce vorbim? O perspectivă teoretică asupra populismului. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 55–86). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Koban, J., & Danetiu, M. I. (2013). Populist elites in postcommunist Romania. *International Relations and European Studies (RISE)*, V Suppl., 279–290.
- Kopecky, P., & Mudde, C. (2002). The two sides of Euroscepticism. Party positions on European integration in East Central Europe, *European Union Politics*, 3(3), 297–326.
- Krämer, B. (2014). Media populism: A conceptual clarification and some theses on its effects. *Communication Theory*, 24(1), 42–60.
- Krastev, I. (2007). The strange death of the liberal consensus. *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), 56–63.
- Marinescu, A. (2010). Prin mit la realitate: discursul populist în România. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 119–158). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Mișcoiu, S. (2010). Introducere. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 11–52). Iași, Romania: Editura Institutul European.
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(3), 541–563.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2001). The return of populism—The 2000 Romanian elections. *Government and Opposition*, 36(2), 230–252.
- Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2007). EU accession is no “end of history.” *Journal of Democracy*, 18(4), 8–16.
- Nabăr, L. (2010). Observații finale și perspective ale studiilor populismului românesc. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 311–316). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.

- Pop-Eleches, G. (2001). Romania's politics of dejection. *Journal of Democracy*, 12(3), 156–169.
- Rooduijn, M. (2014). The nucleus of populism: In search of the lowest common denominator. *Government and Opposition*, 49(4), 573–599.
- Șandru, D. (2012). Componente ideologice ale populismului. In S. Gherghina, S. Mișcoiu, & S. Soare (Eds.), *Populismul contemporan: un concept controversat și formele sale diverse* (pp. 73–112). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Șandru, D., & Condur, G. (2001). Democratizare și demagogie în România postcomunistă. In C. Turliuc & A. Zub, (Eds.), *Populism, demagogie, realism politic* (pp. 91–108). Iași, Romania: Fundația academică “A.D. Xenopol.”
- Shafir, M. (2008). From historical to “dialectical” populism: The case of post-communist Romania. *Canadian Slavonic Papers Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, 50(3/4), 425–470.
- Soare, S. (2010). Genul și speciile populismului românesc. O incursiune pe tărâmul *Tinereții fără bătrânețe* și al *Vieții fără de moarte*. In S. Gherghina & S. Mișcoiu (Eds.), *Partide și personalități populiste în România postcomunistă* (pp. 87–118). Iași, Romania: Institutul European.
- Sum, P. E. (2010). The radical right in Romania: Political party evolution and the distancing of Romania from Europe. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 43(1), 19–29.
- Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.