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### **BETWEEN LIBERTY AND CONTROL: CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROMANIAN STATE SURVEILLANCE**

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# **BETWEEN LIBERTY AND CONTROL: CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROMANIAN STATE SURVEILLANCE**

Paul TAP<sup>1</sup>

## **Abstract**

Surveillance was extensively analyzed in the literature from multiple standpoints. Some studies looked to the temporal development of surveillance, while others analyzed the traditional theories that influenced many of the contemporary surveillance studies. All these studies define surveillance as an activity that is ubiquitous and performed globally, by multiple private and public institutions, through the involvement of specific technologies. However, little attention was paid to the perceptions of citizens about surveillance. This article addresses this gap in the literature and analyses how state surveillance is perceived by the Romanian citizens according to the socio-demographic factors (i.e., age, education, income, gender and medium of residence). The aim of the study is to explain how socio-demographic factors influence the acceptance of state surveillance. It also controls for the left-right self-placement, and the use of Facebook as source of information. The statistical analysis uses individual level data from an original survey conducted between October-November 2020. The survey was completed by 1,140 respondents, and the article uses correlation and linear regression to analyze the data. The findings illustrate that the acceptance of state surveillance is influenced by the gender, level of education and medium of residence of the individuals. The age and income of the citizens have no effect on the acceptance of state surveillance.

Keywords: surveillance, acceptance, socio-demographic factors, state institutions, Romania.

## **Introduction**

The activities related to surveillance date back to ancient times. Throughout centuries, countries have tended to obtain valuable information regarding their competitors, enemies or main threats to their internal and external security (Bungert,

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Heitmann, & Wala, 2003; Andrew, 2018). Initially, surveillance activities were ascribed to intelligence services or other specialized institutions that performed covered operations, but nowadays surveillance is performed by a plethora of institutions that come outside the area of intelligence services (e.g. private institutions, corporations, Internet providers, schools, hospitals or individuals) (Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012). Previous studies tried to explain surveillance from the perspective of how it can be defined, which are its main components, or how many types of surveillance exist (Ball, & Webster, 2003; Lyon, 2006; Slobogin, 2007). Another body of literature explored extensively how the technological evolutions have changed the global landscape of surveillance (Haggerty, & Ericson, 2000, 2006; Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012). However, little attention was given to citizens' perceptions towards state surveillance in post-Communist countries according to socio-demographic factors.

This article seeks to address this gap in the literature by analyzing how socio-demographic factors influence the acceptance of state surveillance in Romania, i.e., a country with communist past. The article uses individual level data from an original survey (i.e., it was created by the author) conducted between October-November 2020, on a representative sample (i.e., the respondents differed in terms of age, gender or other socio-demographic factors) of 1,140 respondents, at national level. The survey was shared exclusively online via snowball methodology, and the analysis uses statistical techniques (i.e. correlation and linear regression). The main purpose of the survey was to contribute to the understanding of citizens' perceptions towards political and security aspects. A specific emphasis of the survey was put on the acceptance of state surveillance (i.e., the dependent variable of the article), and how Romanian citizens perceive it according to their age, gender, level of education, income and medium of residence. The answers provided by the respondents belonging to different socio-demographic groups represented the main dataset to which the analysis rests on, because their positions towards state surveillance varied (see the research design and the analysis). Romania is a critical case for studying these attitudes (and one that was not approached extensively in previous research) because of its communist past that was characterized by intensified surveillance and control of the population. Also, the national media shows an increased attention to surveillance in contemporary times, and especially to the activities of surveillance institutions in Romania, and as a result, the relevance of the study is enhanced because surveillance in Romania could be a subject of interest for mere citizens or established researchers.

This is one of the first studies that explains how socio-demographic factors (i.e., age, education, income, gender and medium of residence) could influence the acceptance of state surveillance of the Romanian citizens. The article can contribute to the literature in two ways. First, it delivers proofs regarding how citizens of a post-communist country perceive state surveillance after 30 years from the collapse of the communist regime and the beginning of democratization. Second, it provides results that could be of interest for sociologists because

it explains what socio-demographic factors could (or could not) influence the acceptance of state surveillance.

The remaining article is structured as it follows: the next section presents how surveillance is portrayed in the literature from a theoretical perspective, and formulates several testable hypotheses. The second section includes the research design with an emphasis on data, variable operationalization and methods. The third section provides an overview of surveillance in Romania, by describing the main surveillance bodies of the state, as well as the legislative regulations of these institutions and their public image. The fourth includes the analysis and the interpretation of the results. The conclusions present the main findings and the implications of the article for the broader field of study.

### **Surveillance: theoretical framework and citizens' perceptions**

In the last 20 years, the interest in surveillance studies has grown steadily in the literature. A plethora of researchers coming from sociology, political science, geography, history, philosophy, information science or psychology have strived to conceptualize and explain surveillance (Lyon, 2002b). Therefore, a large body of definitions has emerged. Some authors emphasized that 'surveillance involves the collection and analysis of information about populations, in order to govern their activities (...) surveillance is now a general tool used to accomplish any number of institutional goals' (Haggerty, & Ericson, 2006, 3) or 'surveillance (...) refers to government efforts to gather information about people from a distance, usually covertly and without entry into private spaces' (Slobogin, 2007, 3).

Another definition underlines that 'surveillance involves the observation, recording and categorization of information about people, processes and institutions. It calls for the collection of information, its storage, examination and as a rule its transmission' (Ball, & Webster, 2003, 1). Other associate surveillance with a 'powerful "empirical window" through which we can witness how people and their data doubles are being processed, monitored and controlled' (Boersma *et al.*, 2014, 2). Moreover, some studies outlined that 'surveillance is practiced particularly in workplaces, public spaces, and total institutions, such as prisons and the military, because those in position of authority do not trust those below them' (Lyon, 2003, 37).

In addition to this body of literature, it is worth to mention that there were several theories that represented a departure point for many surveillance studies. Among them we can mention, Orwell's *1984* in which he portrayed a totalitarian world where individuals were permanently supervised by the 'Big Brother' via telescreens – a device of surveillance that could never be completely shut down. Even though, *1984* represents a product of fantasy, Orwell's ideas were frequently encountered in reality. For instance, the 1964 military *coup d'état* in Brazil laid the foundation of a nationally spread surveillance network where those who were

considered dangerous for the system were permanently monitored. Most of them were arrested, deported or even eliminated by the state (Boersma *et al.*, 2014).

Along similar lines, Bentham brought into discussion the idea of authoritarian control of the state, and promoted an architectural prison design in which the inmates were supervised without being aware. The model could be applied also in schools, factories or hospitals (Ball, & Webster, 2003; Brunon-Ernst, 2012). Foucault built on Bentham's ideas and developed the concept of the panopticon: the idea of the few supervising the many goes beyond total institutions (Foucault, 1995). The main idea of panopticism is to inflict a state through which individuals become aware that are permanently supervised to assure an automatic function of power (Lyon, 2006). It is associated with authoritarian means of governing a state, and was noted as a product of modernity (Sarigül, 2018).

Media development has decreased the importance of physical presence for experiencing situations, events or actions. Even if you stay at home, you are permanently connected to the exterior world through television, radio, telephone or the Internet. Electronic media has altered the importance of time and space for social interactions, and it has become globally spread. All these evolutions gave birth to synopticon, which represents the opposite of panopticon. In synopticon, the surveillance occurs when the many supervise the few, via media, television or other digital technologies (Meyrowitz, 1985). In contrast to panopticism, which occurs more or less locally, synopticism represents a global phenomenon, and those who were subjects in panopticism become spectators in synopticism (Sarigül, 2018). However, some studies emphasized that panopticism and synopticism are intertwined because every individual is supervised and supervisor at the same time, and both concepts imply a level of control over the other (Mathiesen, 1997; Couch *et al.*, 2015).

Other researchers outline that, starting with the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a new type of surveillance has emerged, i.e. omniopticon. Omniopticon corresponds with the development of cyber-space, and emphasize that everybody is supervised through the digital tools advanced by the evolution of the Internet. In cyber-space, it does not matter who you are or what intentions you have, because by accessing the Internet and its facilities you have already exposed yourself to a degree of control and surveillance (Sarigül, 2018).

Some researchers went further and stated that liberal societies do not embrace the same level of intrusion into citizens' privacy, but resort to the 'Soft Sister' of 'Big Brother'. Broadly, 'Soft Sister' refers to governments' initiatives of making individuals offer their data in exchange for welfare services (e.g. access to education, health services, leisure activities). The 'Soft Sister' metaphor is much more subtle and appealing for the individuals, as well as more effective and durable for the longstanding objectives of the government (Boersma *et al.*, 2014).

Apart from these theoretical insights, it is worth to mention that citizens are not always willing to accept state surveillance, even though governments refer to it

as a mandatory condition for fulfilling the security objectives of the state (Gandy, 2003; Dinev *et al.*, 2006). Contemporary societies are ‘risk societies’ where a plethora of threats continuously harm the internal and external security of the states (e.g., criminal activities, cyber-attacks, terrorism) (Beck, 1996). In order to manage and obliterate them, authorities look for exerting a degree of control over the sectors of public life, to make sure that society will not be affected by unpredictable dangers (Garland, 2001). All of these are performed via extensive surveillance that took place nationally, as well as in cooperation with international actors (Wood, & Webster, 2009). However, surveillance activities could threaten the rights and liberties of the citizens (e.g., their privacy, liberty of communication, expression or movement) because of the intrusive nature of surveillance, and most of the citizens are reluctant to accept state surveillance, because of the possible infringements to their rights and liberties (Slobogin, 2007). Earlier research shows that citizens are willing to embrace state surveillance when their security interests are at stake, but tend to reject state surveillance when it goes beyond security objectives (Rosenbloom, 2014).

### *Socio-demographic factors and the different attitudes towards state surveillance*

While previous section promoted a general discussion over surveillance and the possible human rights and liberties infringements, the current one proposes several arguments that could explain how socio-demographic factors (i.e., age, level of education, income, gender and medium of residence) could influence the acceptance of state surveillance. In this sense, the acceptance of surveillance could be influenced by the past experiences that one generation (i.e., the elders) faced and another has not (i.e., the youths), namely the Communism. Broadly, the Communism is characterized by terror, repression and propaganda. Similarly, freedom of expression and thought are prohibited by communist regimes, which usually obliged the population to accept without question the state’s ideology (Corner, 2009). That being said, Communism is well-known for its repressive nature and control of the population, which usually is performed via intensified surveillance (Svenonius, & Björklund, 2018b).

The communist regime in Romania (1947-1989) terrorized the Romanian citizens through Securitate (i.e., a structure that was created by the Intelligence Army Branch of the USSR-GRU, and used by the Romanian Communist Party to conduct its repressive campaign). Securitate had agents and informers infiltrated in all social sectors and state’s institutions (e.g., hospitals, universities, corporations), and its main purpose was to annihilate those who talked against the regime and the political adversaries, as well as to recruit new members (Stan, & Zulean, 2018). Securitate conducted extensive surveillance over the population (e.g., wiretapping, eavesdropping, stakeouts). Also, Romanian citizens’ fundamental rights were abusefully infringed by the communist regime (e.g., freedom of speech, freedom

of movement, freedom of thought), and their privacy was continuously violated by the Securitate, which supervised and control every aspect of their lives (Deletant, 2019). Taking into consideration the trauma of being permanently watched and controlled via surveillance, the older generations could be skeptical to accept state surveillance. In the light of these findings, I expect that:

***H1: Younger generations are more likely to accept state surveillance.***

Another factor that could influence the acceptance of state surveillance could be the level of education of the citizens. Highly educated citizens are usually associated with those categories of individuals that are more likely to inform themselves about the social realities of their countries (e.g., security threats, public policies). They can be more involved in social dynamics, and take better decisions that could enhance the prosperity of their communities (e.g., better decisions in elections, they can oppose state's abuses, they are more involved in democratic processes) (Dow, 2011). Highly educated citizens are usually acquainted with the main threats that endanger the national security and their safety, and know that state surveillance is a necessity for combating these threats.

Even though intensified surveillance could be dangerous for their privacy, highly educated citizens could be more open to the idea of giving up to certain liberties for the sake of security (Nam, 2019). Moreover, highly educated citizens are inclined to inform themselves from official and reliable sources (e.g., scientific researches, official reports), and as a result, are harder to be manipulated by those who want to inflict the idea that state surveillance is a conspiracy conducted by the authorities that want to subdue the population (Eveland, 2004; Douglas *et al.*, 2019). Following these arguments, I expect that:

***H2: Highly educated citizens are more likely to accept state surveillance.***

Citizens' income could influence the acceptance of state surveillance. Earlier studies emphasized that the relationship between money and happiness is not a strong one (Boyce, Brown and Moore, 2010). One possible explanation for this effect could be the one that happiness is relative, and there is no universal cluster of values or goods that could guarantee ones' happiness. Individuals' happiness is subjective, and is determined by different factors (e.g. self-esteem, self-realization, friends) (Veenhoven, 1991). However, higher incomes could enhance individuals' welfare because rich people can access and buy many of the things people desire in life (e.g. material goods, vacations, safety) (Lucas, & Schimmack, 2009). Also, it was noted that rich people usually live longer than poor individuals, because they have access to better health services and could live a healthier life (Coburn, 2004).

Despite their benefits, higher incomes could be a source of stress for the wealthier that could enhance their rejection towards state surveillance. The main argument that support this statement is the one that rich citizens could not be willing to accept any entity to supervise them, because are afraid that their personal data and information could be leaked or unprotected, and as a result their wealth could be endangered. Taking into consideration that we live in an era where

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everybody is exposed to a certain degree of surveillance (Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012), citizens with higher incomes could reject state surveillance more easily than those with lower incomes, because the first do not want to unveil their sources of income or their goods, and as a result to become a victim of specific attacks directed towards their fortune. Consequently, I expect that:

***H3: Citizens with lower income are more likely to accept state surveillance.***

The acceptance of state surveillance could be influenced by the gender of the citizens. Earlier research emphasized that there are differences between women and men when it comes to their positions towards security threats that endanger their safety. Simply put, women manifest higher levels of anxiety towards security threats of any kind comparing to men (Lewinsohn *et al.*, 1998; Carter *et al.*, 2011; Valentova, & Alieva, 2014). For instance, women showed higher degrees of insecurity and uneasiness towards terrorism, even though terrorist activities generate the same level of danger for everybody regardless their gender (Nellis, 2009). The same outcome applies when it comes to sexual or physical assaults, and this behavior could be explained through the fact the women consider themselves more exposed to these kinds of threats. Also, they perceive their abilities to defend themselves lower in comparison to men's abilities (Lane, & Meeker, 2003).

Similarly, women manifested higher concerns towards criminal activities not only because their safety could be endangered, but their children's too. Women usually are more involved in childcare and housing activities, and it is almost natural to develop concerns regarding the safety of their children and environment (Valentova, & Alieva, 2014). In addition, women showed a high level of support for enhancing security policies towards personal data protection via electronic means (McGill, & Thompson, 2018). Taking into consideration that state surveillance is justified by the governments through the need for enhancing the national security and the safety of the citizens, I expect that:

***H4: Women are more likely to accept state surveillance.***

In addition to these factors, medium of residence could affect the acceptance of state surveillance. The main idea of this hypothesis is related to the degree of exposure to technology depending on the medium of residence. Technological advancements have created new opportunities for individuals to stay informed, maintain social connections and become more efficient (e.g., online shopping, online payment). Also, technology is ubiquitous nowadays, and represents a necessity for proper function of modern societies (Mitzner *et al.*, 2010).

Despite the benefits that technological developments have brought for societies and individuals, the extensive use of technologies could endanger individuals' privacy. For instance, the use of CCTV systems in public and private spaces coupled with the online operations that demand personal information (e.g., e-commerce) could inflict to the individuals a state of uneasiness that their lives are controlled and watched by the authorities or service providers (Lyon, 2002a; Dinev *et al.*, 2006). Their uneasiness grows according to the level of exposure to technologies,

and as a result they will develop reluctant attitudes towards technology usage and state surveillance (Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012).

Earlier studies stressed that there are discrepancies between rural and urban areas when it comes to technology usage and exposure. Usually, those individuals living in rural areas do not use, and are not exposed to the same degree of technology as those living in urban areas (Hindman, 2000; Stern, Adams, & Elsasser, 2009). Therefore, the first could accept easily state surveillance due to the fact that are not exposed to the same degree of technology usage as those living in urban areas, and as a result, they are not stressed that they are constantly monitored. Therefore, I expect that:

***H5: Citizens who live in rural areas are more likely to accept state surveillance.***

### *Control variables*

In addition to these main effects, this article tests for two control variables that can influence the acceptance of state surveillance: left-right placement and Facebook usage for information.

The left-right political orientation debate revolves around the concepts such as social equality and egalitarianism vs. hierarchies and inequalities. Put simply, those who consider that social order is generated by the equality between individuals, and there should not be differences between them, usually are more likely to support left or social ideologies. Conversely, individuals who have more liberal views, and support the idea that social hierarchies represent a natural result of social differences, are inclined to embrace right orientations (Kitschelt, & Hellmans, 1990; Piurko, Schwartz, & Davidov, 2011). Therefore, those citizens who position themselves of the right side of the political axis could reject state surveillance, because of their liberal views that usually oppose to social control and state's involvement in their lives. Also, the leftist could accept easily state surveillance, because they consider that everybody should be treated equally, and state authorities know better how to assure the social order and national security.

The social media, and especially Facebook have started to be extensively used by the individuals, regardless of their age, for personal information. Apart from the informative purpose of Facebook, those who use social media networks are part of a large community that stimulates equality, open dialogues and a state of belonging to a group that shares the same values and principles regarding social media usage (Bene, 2017). However, those who use Facebook as a source of information could shape their opinions according to how the other users position themselves towards specific issues (e.g., acceptance of state surveillance). Taking into consideration that Facebook permits to everybody to express their opinions, as long as it conforms with the community's policies, the information that is circulated on it could be contrary to the official statements. As a result, those who use Facebook for personal information could reject state surveillance on the grounds that the other users promote a stance against surveillance in general, and

raise into discussion the threats of being supervised by the state, or could accept state surveillance because the opinions of their fellow citizens could be favorable to it.

## Research design

This article analyzes how the socio-demographic factors (i.e., age, education, income, gender and medium of residence) influence the acceptance of state surveillance of the Romanian citizens. Romania is an appropriate setting for studying these attitudes, because of two reasons. First, the communist regime in Romania was characterized by intensified surveillance and control of the population. These actions affected the trust of the citizens into the state's institutions (especially those in charge with surveillance activities), and created a state of paranoia among Romanian residents that they are permanently watched by the state (Stan, & Zulean, 2018; Svenonius, & Björklund, 2018a). Second, even though, after the collapse of the Communism in Romania, in 1989, Securitate (i.e. the main structure that conducted extensive surveillance of the population) disappeared, there were still scandals associated with the new surveillance structures in Romania (e.g., corruption among SRI officers, improper use of surveillance structures by the politicians, illegal surveillance without warrants) (Stan, & Zulean, 2018). All of these scandals demonstrate that the Romanian democracy still has a long way to go, before it reaches the quality of the Western ones. The corruption scandals and the improper use of surveillance structures enhance the lack of trust of the citizens into authorities, and emphasize several institutional vulnerabilities (e.g., corruption, misuse of authority, lack of transparency of surveillance institutions) (Mediafax, 2015).

In this vein, post-communist Romania is characterized by a culture of distrust rather than one in which citizens left behind the communist past, and started to exert high levels of trust into the new democratic regime (Sztompka, 1998). In addition, the period for analysis (i.e., 2020) corresponds with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemics that created a favorable context for enhancing surveillance policies, in order to control the spread of the disease. There were multiple accounts in the international as well as national media that presented the increased surveillance policies and technologies involvement for supervising those placed under institutionalized quarantine (e.g., aerial and CCTV surveillance of public spaces, as well as the apartments of those quarantined, technological apps that trace the movement of those infected) (Digi24, 2020; Kharpal, 2020). Therefore, the increased surveillance policies due to COVID-19 pandemics issued in a country with communist past could enhance citizens' uneasiness towards state surveillance.

The article uses individual level data from an original survey conducted in Romania between October-November 2020. The survey was shared exclusively online through snowball methodology in which those who completed the survey

were asked to share it to other respondents. The data used for the analysis comes from 1,140 respondents. Their age varies between 18 and 71, and differed in terms of education (primary and secondary school, high school, university and post-university degree) and medium of residence (rural and urban). Also, the income varies between under 1,000 RON and over 10,000 RON, and from the total number of respondents there were 56% women and 44% men.

### *Variable operationalization*

The dependent variable of the article (i.e., the acceptance of state surveillance) is measured through the answers provided to the question “At what level do you consider to be appropriate the population surveillance by state institutions in our country?”. The available answers are coded on a 11-point ordinal scale, with values ranging between “not at all” (coded 0) to “very much” (coded 10).

The age of the respondents (H1) is a numerical variable that corresponds to the respondents’ years at the time of the survey. Education (H2) was measured through the answer received to the question “What is the last graduated school?”. The respondents had five possibilities that were coded ascendingly, i.e. primary or secondary school (coded 1), professional school (2), high school (3), university (4) and postgraduate studies (the later coded 5). The income (H3) was measured by the answers given to the question “What is the total net income per month per family member in your household?”. The possible answers vary between under 1,000 RON and over 10,000 RON. As for the gender (H4), the respondents could choose between two possibilities, i.e. female and male.

The medium of residence is operationalized through the question “Currently, you are living in (tick the option that corresponds to the place where you spend most of your time)”. The available answers were coded on a four-point ordinal scale, where village was coded with 1, and large cities with over 300,000 inhabitants with 4. Between those categories there were small town and average city.

The left-right placement (i.e., the first control variable) was measured through the question “In politics we talk about the left and the right. Using the scale below, where you would position yourself (move the cursor to reflect your position)?”. The possibilities were positioned on a 11-point ordinal scale, where the left was coded with 0 and the right with 10. The usage of Facebook for information (i.e., the second control variable) was gauged through the question “How often do you use Facebook for your information?”. The respondents had five response possibilities, i.e. 1) never, 2) several times a month, 3) once a week, 4) two or three times a week and 5) daily.

The analysis uses correlation and linear regression (OLS). Correlation explains if there is a relation between the variables. However, it has a limitation because it does not show which is the effect and the causation between the variables. To explain these relations, I use OLS. OLS explains the effects that one variable produce to the other, and takes into consideration possible errors or other influential

factors that could affect the relation between the variables. The dependent variable of this study is measured on a *Likert* scale with sufficient values to be considered interval-ratio, a level of analysis that is appropriate for OLS. Multi-collinearity is important, because it shows if there is a correlation between at least two predictors. Multi-collinearity raises several dangers. One of them is represented by the fact that if there is a high degree of correlation between predictors and they produce similar variations, we do not know which one is important (Field, 2013). However, the multi-collinearity test indicates that there are no reasons to worry, because the highest VIF score is 1.26 and the highest value of the correlation is 0.36 between age and education. Therefore, the test indicates that the independent variables and the control ones do not correlate high.

### **Surveillance in Romania: institutions, legislation and public image**

There are six main institutions that deal with surveillance activities in Romania: Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI), Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE), Protection and Guard Service (SPP), Special Telecommunications Service (STS), General Directorate of Internal Protection (DGPI) and General Directorate for Defense Intelligence (DGIA). All these institutions perform covered or uncovered activities of gathering, analyzing and capitulating information regarding the internal and external threats that could endanger the national security of the state, as well as the public order.<sup>1</sup>

These institutions are part of the national defense system, and they act according to the constitutional provisions. They are in charge with all of the actions that aim to assure the security of the state, protect its values and citizens, promote Romanian's security interests abroad, and preserve the social, economic and political stability that is necessary for the development of the state. These activities are extensively approached in the Romanian Fundamental Law, i.e., law no. 51/1991<sup>2</sup>. Apart from this law that encapsulates the objectives and actions headed towards assuring the national security of the state, specific laws regulate the activities of the surveillance institutions presented above, i.e., SRI-Law no. 14/1992<sup>3</sup>, SIE-Law no. 1/1998<sup>4</sup>, DGPI-Law no. 194/2017<sup>5</sup>, SPP-Law no. 191/1998<sup>6</sup>, STS-Law no. 92/1996<sup>7</sup> and DGIA (the law that regulates Ministry of Defense activities)-Law no. 167/2017<sup>8</sup>. All these legislative provisions guide the activities of the surveillance institutions, and emphasize that their activities must be conducted without violating citizens' fundamental rights.

The Fundamental Law regulates the surveillance activities of the state's specialized bodies and the conditions under which employers must conduct their surveillance over employees. In this sense, Law no. 190/2018<sup>9</sup> is in line with the European GDPR policies, and portrays the means, ways and motives for which

an employer can monitor its employees. Also, the same law outlines the sanctions to which employers are subjected if they do not comply with the legal conditions for supervising employees.

Due to the fact that surveillance institutions perform secret activities, there is very little information that is publicly available regarding their performances. As a result, Romanian citizens are unable to shape a neutral perspective towards surveillance institutions due to the information shortages. However, several media portals tried to shape the image of the Romanian surveillance institutions through the lenses of several incidents that endangered their image. For instance, there were accounts of some DGIA high ranked officers that did not deliver in due time valuable information for the president, and as an effect, his image was harmed by the statements he made based on insufficient information (Tache, 2020). Similarly, STS was accused of incompetence because was not able to pinpoint the location of Alexandra Măceșeanu<sup>10</sup> after she called the authorities from the place where she was sequestered (Solomon, 2019). Also, DGPI was accused of possessing the necessary infrastructure of intercepting individuals' communications, even though it does not has the legal right to do so (Zoltan, 2017). On top of that, SRI was accused of corruption, because it was used by specific politicians to conduct illegal surveillance and collaborate with the National Anti-Corruption Direction (DNA) in manufacturing of criminal cases (Mediafax, 2017).

The media portrayed Romanian surveillance institutions as being corrupt and sometimes incompetent. Even though most of the accuses were denounced by the institutions' representatives, it is worth to mention that the messages conveyed through media portals could negatively influence citizens' perceptions towards state surveillance, and enhance the lack of trust into state's authorities. However, since I did not find any study that dealt with gauging citizens' perceptions towards state surveillance, this section provides only a possible perspective towards how individuals could perceive surveillance institutions using only the information released in the media so far.

## Analysis and results

*Figure 1* presents the variations of answers to the question “At what level do you consider to be appropriate the population surveillance by state institutions in our country?” (i.e., the dependent variable of the article). The answers were measured on a 11-point ordinal scale, where zero stands for “not at all” and 10 for “very much”. The horizontal axis depicts the percentages of respondents for each answer category, and the vertical axis the possible answers. The *Figure 1* stresses that there is a high variation among respondents regarding their acceptance of state surveillance.

One general observation is that slightly more people accept surveillance to a high degree (roughly 8%), compared to those who reject it completely (slightly

less than 6%). If we add up the first three bars from bottom to top, it results that roughly one in five citizens has a major problem with state surveillance. A similar result is given if we add up the sum of the last three bars from top to bottom, which means that one in five citizens accept the state surveillance to a very high degree. Another general observation is that most of the population is positioned between these extremes which support the idea that most of the individuals has no major problems with surveillance. Also, roughly 53% of the respondents chosen an answer that corresponded to the points 2, 3 and 4 (i.e., roughly 9%, 10% and 9% with a total of 28%) and 6, 7, 8 (i.e., roughly 8%, 9% and 8% with a total of 25%) which support the idea that most of the respondents are inclined to choose a response that is closer to the central positions of the scale, rather than those closer to the extremes. Almost, one quarter of respondents (i.e., 24% of the total) chosen a response corresponding to point 5 of the scale. There responses could indicate a degree of moderation in their approach. There is also a possibility to observe the bias of the middle category (when respondents do not have a clear opinion regarding a specific question, they are inclined to choose an answer that is placed closer to the middle categories).

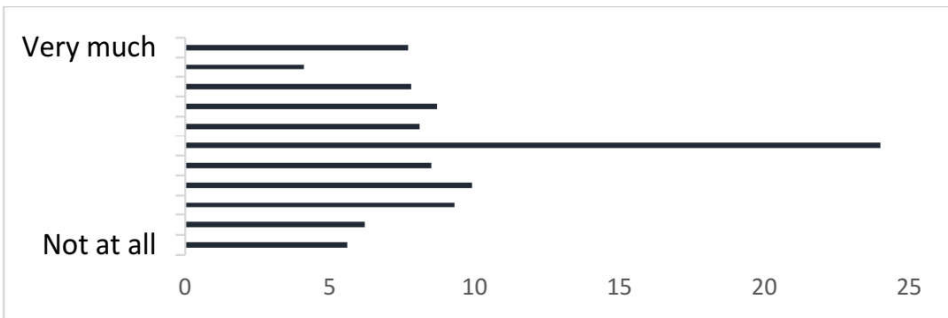


Figure 1. The distribution of respondents' acceptance of surveillance (N=1028)

Table 1 presents the bivariate relationship between the variables of the article (i.e., independent, control and dependent). The correlation coefficients indicate the extent to which the variables are related, without testing for causal effect. It is only a partial test of the hypotheses, which is still useful because it provides relevant information. The empirical evidence presented in Table 1 finds support for four out of the five hypotheses.

There is a negative correlation between age (H1) and the acceptance of state surveillance. This means that younger generations accept easily state surveillance in comparison to older generations. Even though the correlation is weak (-0.08), it is still statistically significant at the 0.01 level, which allows for the generalization of results. The income (H3) correlates negatively to the acceptance of state surveillance (-0.03) which means that those with lower incomes accept easily

state surveillance than those with higher incomes. The gender of the citizens (H4) has a negative effect of -0.12 towards the acceptance of state surveillance, which confirms that women accept more easily state surveillance comparing to the men. The medium of residence (H5) has the same negative effect as the age of the citizens, i.e. -0.08. Accordingly, those living in rural areas are more likely to accept state surveillance. The only variable that has no empirical support is the citizens' level of education (H2). There is a negative correlation between education and acceptance of state surveillance (-0.10), which means that lower educated citizens accept more easily state surveillance.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients

	Correlation coefficient	N
Age	-0.08**	1112
Education	-0.10**	1108
Income	-0.03	1089
Gender	-0.12**	1112
Medium of residence	-0.08**	1110
Left-right placement	0.08*	983
Use Facebook for information	0.11**	1080

1) Notes: All correlation coefficients are Pearson.

2) \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

Both control variables correlate positively with the acceptance of state surveillance, i.e., 0.08 for left-right placement, and 0.11 for the usage of Facebook for information. In other words, those with liberal views accept easily state surveillance and the same effect applies for those who use Facebook for information.

### *The regression analysis*

Let us now turn to the multivariate statistical analysis. I ran two OLS models, i.e., one without control variables, and model 2 with control variables. The results revealed no significant differences between the two models. The findings of the multivariate analysis are almost in line with those of the correlations, but there are several differences between them.

In the multivariate analysis, age (H1) has no effect on the acceptance of state surveillance, even though in the bivariate model had. This effect is contrary to the theoretical expectations. There are at least four possible explanations that could explain this effect. The first explanation can be that in the regression models the explanatory power of the variable loads on other variables, e.g. the gender of the citizens. The second explanation could be that the citizens (especially older

generations) left behind the communist past of Romania, and started to trust the state's institutions and the process of democratization that started in 1990. The third factor that could explain this effect is that the Romanian accession to the European Union has instilled to the citizens a state of security that they are protected by a superior authority that could sanction the national institutions if they violate the fundamental rights of the citizens (e.g., the right to privacy). The Romanians support the European Union and believe that its values bring benefits for the overall development of the country (Marinescu, 2020). In addition, the fact that the age does not influence the acceptance of state surveillance could be explained through the gradual exposure to technological usage. Most of the public and private institutions use surveillance technologies (e.g., surveillance cameras, scanners), and those who use online payment apps or services are conscious that they expose themselves to a degree of surveillance instrumented by the service providers. Therefore, according to the sampled population, the Romanian citizens, regardless of their age, could accept state surveillance as a natural condition of modern societies.

Another difference between the multivariate and bivariate models is represented by the fact that in the bivariate model the income (H3) had a negative effect towards the acceptance of state surveillance and in the multivariate model it has a very weak positive effect of 0.03. This is close to statistical independence: citizens accept surveillance to the same extent regardless their income. This effect goes against the theoretical expectations. One possible explanation for why the income produce no effect for the acceptance of state surveillance could be the one that citizens consider that state surveillance is not directed towards their incomes but towards other elements (e.g., personal data, social activities, movement tracing). Also, they could trust the Romanian institutions that protect their financial deposits (e.g., banks) and as a result they consider that state surveillance could not violate those institutions' regulations of protecting the clients' finances.

The level of education (H2) has a negative effect towards the acceptance of state surveillance. The findings contradict the theoretical expectations. One possible explanation for why lower educated citizens accept more easily state surveillance could be the one that they are not always aware of the risks raised by the intensified state surveillance. Highly educated citizens are not acquainted only with the threats that endanger the national security, but with the benefits that state surveillance brings to the achievement of the security goals of the state. However, they could be aware also of the threats that surveillance raised for their fundamental rights (e.g., right to privacy, correspondence and communication secrecy). As a result, they could develop reluctant attitudes towards the acceptance of state surveillance because they do not want to lose their privacy and to offer the state full access to their personal data.

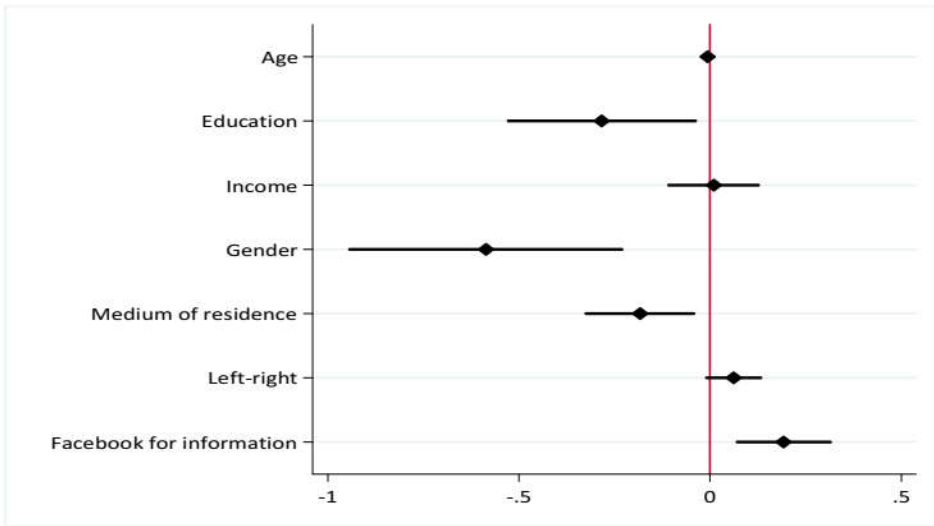


Figure 2. The Effects on Acceptance of Surveillance

Note: The regression coefficients depicted here are available in Appendix 1 (Model 2)

According to the survey, lower educated individuals could not possess the same level of information towards state surveillance as highly educated citizens do. They could not be aware of the fact that surveillance raises several threats to their privacy, and as a result, they could embrace more easily state surveillance. Also, because of their lower level of literacy towards the risks involved by state surveillance, they could accept every regulation issued by the state authorities, even though these could endanger their fundamental rights.

The gender (H4) has a strong positive correlation towards the acceptance of state surveillance, in the sense that women accept more easily state surveillance as compared to men. The results confirm the theoretical expectations. Women are more likely to accept state surveillance because they are more exposed to be victims of different kinds of assaults. There were several accounts in the media that emphasized that women in Romania are abused by their husbands or felt victims of other kinds of abuses (e.g., physical and sexual violence) (Pitu, 2020; Ștefănescu, 2020). The media releases emphasized that women are more vulnerable to any kind of violence in comparison to men, and usually feel more unsecured than the last. Therefore, women could perceive an increased level of state surveillance as a necessity for improving their personal safety and, as a result, they accept more easily state surveillance in comparison to men.

The regression models indicate that the medium of residence (H5) correlates positively to the acceptance of state surveillance. In other words, those living in rural areas and small towns accept easily state surveillance. The findings are in line with the theoretical expectations. One possible explanation for this effect could be

the one that the discrepancies between the rural and urban areas when it comes to technology access and usage increase the chances that the inhabitants of villages or small towns to accept easily state surveillance, because they are not exposed to a similar degree of surveillance technologies as those living in urban areas or big towns. These statements are in line with the realities in Romania. Most rural areas in the country have limited access to technology, including access to the Internet (Tomoiaga, 2020). Taking into consideration that the technological developments inflict to the individuals a state of uneasiness that their privacy could be endangered by intensified surveillance policies (Ball, Haggerty, & Lyon, 2012), the survey showed that those living in areas with no or lower levels of technology access or exposure do not develop such reluctant attitudes towards surveillance, and as a result could accept more easily state surveillance.

Both control variables influence the acceptance of state surveillance. According to the multivariate analysis, those who approach right-wing political orientations accept slightly more surveillance than those who position themselves on the left side of the political axis. One possible explanation for this effect is that despite their liberal views and the rejection of state intervention and control of their lives, liberals are aware that some problems require state intervention to be resolved (e.g., national security). They could perceive any security vulnerability or risk as a direct threat to their liberties, and could accept that state surveillance is a necessary mean for assuring their security and liberties. Also, those who use Facebook as a source of information accept more easily state surveillance because the usage of social media networks involves a certain degree of surveillance or wavier of personal data confidentiality (i.e., you cannot create an account on Facebook without giving some personal information), and your profile could be easily supervised by the others. Therefore, the voluntary acceptance of a degree of surveillance in order to use social media networks could be interpreted as a confirmation that those who use Facebook for their information could be more open to the acceptance of state surveillance.

## Conclusions

This article analyzed how socio-demographic factors (i.e., age, education, income, gender and medium of residence) influence the acceptance of state surveillance of the Romanian citizens. The results of the survey conducted between October-November 2020 revealed that most of the citizens have no problem with state surveillance and the level of education, gender and medium of residence affect directly the acceptance of state surveillance. In this sense, more vulnerable categories (e.g. women) accept easily state surveillance because surveillance is usually associated with control and security enhancement. The increased level of surveillance could instill to the individuals who belong to vulnerable categories a feeling that they are watched and protected by the authorities and as a result the

chances to face further assaults decrease. Also, the lack of exposure to specific technologies that endanger ones' privacy (e.g., surveillance technologies) or the lack of knowledge towards the risks raised by specific actions (e.g., state surveillance) have an impact towards the acceptance of state surveillance. In other words, those who are not aware of the risks involved by specific actions are more likely to embrace them in comparison to those who were exposed or are aware of their risks.

The article has two main implications, i.e., empirical and theoretical. First, at the empirical level the article contributes to the enrichment of knowledge towards how citizens of a post-communist country perceive state surveillance, and how their behaviors regarding this particular topic are influenced by socio-demographic factors. The results could be valuable for those interested in surveillance studies because the case of Romania was not extensively approached in the literature upon surveillance, as well as for sociologists, because the article provides proofs regarding which socio-demographic factors influence some degree of acceptance of state surveillance. Second, at the theoretical level, the article proposes an analytical model that shows what explanations could function when it comes to the impact of socio-demographic factors upon the acceptance of state surveillance. The theoretical model – or some parts of it – can be used in further analytical frameworks.

The article has some limitations. First, the study brings only quantitative proofs that some socio-demographic factors could influence (or could not) the acceptance of state surveillance, but it does not explore the citizens' individual perceptions towards it. Second, the article does not analyze if the increased surveillance policies due to the COVID-19 pandemics influenced to some extent citizens' positions towards surveillance.

Starting from these limitations, further studies could use qualitative analysis to explore citizens' perceptions towards state surveillance according to socio-demographic factors. In this sense, there could be realized interviews with citizens who belong to different social categories and age segments. The interviews could look to the elements that were not approached in the article. For instance, they could explore if there are reluctant attitudes towards accepting the state surveillance among women, or if there are cases in which those who live in rural areas and are lower educated could reject state surveillance. Also, further studies could compare the results of this article with other similar studies (i.e., other post-communist countries), or could use the analytical framework to test these effects in countries that have not a totalitarian past.

## Appendix 1. Regression coefficients (OLS)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Education	-0.27* (0.12)	-0.28* (0.13)
Income	0.04 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)
Gender	-0.71** (0.18)	-0.58** (0.18)
Medium of residence	-0.16* (0.07)	-0.18* (0.07)
Left-right placement		0.06 (0.04)
Use Facebook for information		0.19** (0.06)
N	963	943
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.04

1) Notes: Reported coefficients are non-standardized (standard errors in brackets)

2) \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Data is available at the official websites of the institutions: <https://www.sri.ro/>; <https://www.sie.ro/>; <http://www.spp.ro/#/>; <https://www.sts.ro/>; <https://dgpi.ro/>; <https://www.mapn.ro/organizare/dgia/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/gy3deobs/legea-nr-51-1991-privind-siguranta-nationala-a-romaniei>.

<sup>3</sup> The law is available at <https://www.sri.ro/upload/Legea14.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Data is available at <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/13909>.

<sup>5</sup> For more details, go to <https://dgpi.ro/cadrul-legal>.

<sup>6</sup> Data is available at [http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis\\_pck.ftp\\_act\\_text?id=18137](http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.ftp_act_text?id=18137).

<sup>7</sup> For more information, visit <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ge3dgnbx/legea-nr-92-1996-privind-organizarea-si-functionarea-serviciului-de-telecomunicatii-speciale>.

<sup>8</sup> Data extracted from: <https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ge3dmnzwgy3a/legea-nr-167-2017-pentru-modificarea-si-completarea-legii-nr-346-2006-privind-organizarea-si-functionarea-ministerului-apararii>.

<sup>9</sup> Data is available at <https://www.dataprotection.ro/servlet/ViewDocument?id=1520>.

<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Măceșeanu was a 15 year old girl who was abducted and murdered in 2019 and who called the authorities from the alleged place where she was sequestered by the kidnapper. However, her position was not pinpointed in due time.

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