

# The young generation and the temptation of extremism

## The 2000 elections in Romania

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### Introduction. The facts

- the 2000 general elections were preceded by a **broad atmosphere of social dissatisfaction and political confusion**
- the first post-communist alternation in power (1996-2000) was perceived as a failure:
  - compromises; image mistakes
  - endless coalition conflicts
- Emil Constantinescu, the president in function, announced his retirement from the race in the summer of 2000
- the democratic parties threw into race two candidates of the same caliber: Mugur Isărescu and Theodor Stolojan
- the final battle was fought between Ion Iliescu, former president (perceived as neo-communist) and Corneliu Vadim Tudor (the extremist leader of the Great Romania Party)
- Tudor was elected by over 30% from the population with ages between 18 and 44 years**
  - [exit poll - IInd tour - Vadim's voters: 39% 18-29 years and 35% 30-44 years] (Jurnalul Național, December 11, 2000)
- the results were especially shocking since, from 1989, the successive young generations were the main supporters of the new democracy
- Iliescu finally won (with 70%) after a huge mobilization of the press and of the civil society in his favor and against extremism

### Sources

- C.V. Tudor's declarations and electoral program (Revista România Mare - Great Romania Magazine)
- Lyrics of local rap groups
- Newspapers articles (Jurnalul Național - The National Journal; Evenimentul Zilei - The Daily Event, Adevărul - The Truth)

### Method

Case study  
Interdisciplinary,  
Qualitative approach  
---> Historical Discourse Analysis (Wodak, 2001)

### It's all about discourse... in its socio-political context



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#### Corneliu Vadim Tudor

- “court” poet during communism
- extremist
- combining leftist ideas with right-nationalist elements

- models – national radical figures: Vlad the Impaler, Marshal Ion Antonescu (Hitler's ally), Nicolae Ceaușescu (last Romanian communist leader)
- “the country could be governed only with the help of a machine gun” (1998)*

#### Electoral slogan

*“Down the Mafia! Up the nation!”*  
(“Jos Mafia! Sus Patria!”)

**Purpose:** “the salvation of our compatriots that live in the darkest pauperization”.



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appealing primal emotions: anger, fear, pride not reason

recontextualization and reconfiguration of sensitive themes: fight against corruption communist past etc.

#### Strategies in Tudor' discourse

appealing human and national values: compassion, solidarity, patriotism

inconsistence in declaration adaptation of statements: tempered and redirected xenophobic messages (Andreescu, 2003, p. 32)

#### Tudor's 2000 electoral discourse

- conspirational, building upon issues like disunity, poverty and frustrations;
- crafted as to represent the voice of the anonymous, poor people (Tismăneanu, 2001, online), revolting against the system and the corrupted political class;
- a protest against corruption, Mafia, criminality

#### The young generation of 2000

- disappointed by the political class
- resentful
- affected by unemployment and small wages
- living in communist blocks neighborhoods
- coming in contact with different forms of subculture [especially national and foreign rap groups BUG Mafia, Parasites (Paraziții), Eminem]
  - appealing for their protest messages
  - perceived as something relatively new (after the communist censorship)



Photo: a1.ro/news/economic/



Photo: hiphoptorum.sk/news/torum/

BUG Mafia, Behind the blocks (După blocuri), released January 18, 2000

*“The bribe is the one that gets you out of s\*\*t, / A policeman, a prosecutor, a senator and you are out. (...) Maybe the government thinks you are a whore, bro / From the money you make / If you get a half. (...) That we make all we can to be alright (it's normal) / Above the law, above the mercy, above the hospital beds There are good days or bad days, but all stays the same...”*

-----> it was no coincidence that Tudor obtained his success among youngsters listening to rap groups, whose rather violent message suited the radical measures and colorful figures of speech used by the candidate (Gallagher, 2005, p. 286)

Declarations of Tudor's voters indicate 2 major tendencies:

#### I. a need for radical solutions

“We voted for him because he's crazy”.

“Only a crazy man can take us out from this situation”.

(Evenimentul Zilei, November, 27, 2000)

#### II. a sense of revolt taken to the extreme (‘After us, the deluge’ type of revolt)

“We voted for him because we want to ask for political asylum”.

(Evenimentul Zilei, November, 27, 2000)

### Conclusions

- The ascension of extremism in 2000 Romania was favored by the overlapping of two converging ‘layers’ of discourse (protest - revolt discourse).
- It was the ability of the political actor to manipulate a dominant type of discourse (inside a social category) in his favor although the protest was also against him (as a part of the system).
- An important strategy in the extremist Romanian discourse of 2000 was to address the most vulnerable and resentful categories.

### Cited Works

- Andreescu, Gabriel (2003), *Extremismul de dreapta în România*, Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, Cluj-Napoca.
- Gallagher, Tom (2005), *Theft of a Nation. Romania since Communism*, Hurst & Company, London.
- Tismăneanu, Vladimir (2001), *Romania's First Post-Communist Decade: From Iliescu to Iliescu* (at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/225-romania's-first-post-communist-decade-iliescu-to-iliescu>, last accessed 29 March 2014).
- Wodak, Ruth (2001), “The Discourse–Historical Approach”, in Wodak, Ruth & Meyer, Michael (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi, pp. 63-95.

### Further Information

The starting point of this study resides in the critical discourse analysis made for my PhD Thesis: „Legitimation Strategies in the Romanian Electoral Discourse. Campaign Themes in the Presidential Elections between 1990 and 2000”.