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The Big Five Personality Traits and Citizens' Attitudes towards State Surveillance

Summary of the doctoral thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES VI
LIST OF TABLES VII
INTRODUCTION 1
A Subject of Interest for International Relations and European Studies 6
The Relevance of the Thesis: Empirical and Theoretical Contributions 8
Structure of the Thesis 11
CHAPTER 1 15
THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK 15
Introduction 15
A Chronology of Surveillance: Brief Overview 16
Surveillance: Definition and Theoretical Approaches 19
State Surveillance: Definition and Theoretical Approaches 21
Contemporary Surveillance: Four Categories 23
Conducting Contemporary Surveillance 25
Three Theories of Surveillance: Panopticon, Synopticon and Omniopticon 29
Perception: Conceptualization and Meaning 32
Perception towards Politics, Social Aspects and Threats 34
Personality: Conceptualization and Meaning 36
Personality, Politics and Participation 40
Conclusions 43
CHAPTER 2 45
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES 45
Introduction 45
Individuals and the Acceptance of State Surveillance 46
State institutions and the acceptance of surveillance 47
Technological infrastructure and the acceptance of surveillance 49
Specific contexts and the acceptance of surveillance 50
Personality and the Acceptance of State Surveillance 51
The Big Five and the Acceptance of State Surveillance 52
Agreeableness 53

Conscientiousness 55
Extraversion 57
Neuroticism 59
Openness to experience 61
Conclusions 66
CHAPTER 3 69
RESARCH DESIGN 69
Introduction 69
Case Study and Comparative Approaches: Theoretical Perspectives 69
Most similar / different systems design: An overview 71
Romania and Hungary: MSSD 73
COVID-19 and the Increased State Surveillance: The Relevance of Time Frame 74
State surveillance in Hungary and Romania during COVID-19 76
Data and Variable Operationalization 78
Variable operationalization 78
Methods of Data Analysis: Bivariate and Multivariate Statistics 79
Correlations and bivariate analysis 80
Regression and multivariate analysis 81
Conclusions 82
CHAPTER 4 84
STATE SURVEILLNACE IN POST-COMMUNIST HUNGARY AND ROMANIA 84
Introduction 84
State Surveillance in Authoritarian Regimes: Past Trauma Projected in Contemporaneity 85
Hungary and Romania: State surveillance under authoritarian governments 87
Transition to Democracy and the Challenge to Reform Intelligence Agencies 90
The reform of intelligence agencies in new democracies 90
Intelligence Agencies in Post-Communist Romania and Hungary 92
Hungary 93
Romania 96
Contemporary Intelligence Agencies in Hungary and Romania: An Overview 100
Hungary 100
Romania 102

Citizens' Perceptions towards Intelligence Agencies in Post-Communism 105
Perception Formation towards Intelligence Agencies in Hungary and Romania 108
The image of intelligence agencies in Hungary 109
The image of intelligence agencies in Romania 111
Conclusions 113
CHAPTER 5 115
CITIZENS AND STATE SURVEILLANCE IN HUNGARY 115
Introduction 115
General Attitudes towards Accepting State Surveillance in Hungary 115
Bivariate Analysis: The Case of Hungary 118
Multivariate Analysis: The Case of Hungary 121
Personality traits and acceptance of state surveillance in Hungary 121
Control variables and the acceptance of state surveillance in Hungary 128
Conclusions 135
CHAPTER 6 137
CITIZENS AND STATE SURVEILLANCE IN ROMANIA 137
Introduction 137
The Romanians' General Attitudes towards State Surveillance 137
Bivariate Analysis 139
Multivariate Analysis: The Case of Romania 142
Personality traits and acceptance of state surveillance 142
Control variables and acceptance of state surveillance 151
Conclusions 159
CONCLUSIONS 161
Main Results 161
Contributions to the literature and lessons 165
Limitations 171
Avenues for further research 173
List of references 176
Appendix 1 218
Appendix 2 219

Keywords: state surveillance, acceptance, perception, personality, Romania, Hungary

State surveillance is as long as human history. During centuries organizations or individuals used it as a mean through which they could understand the realities around them. The major purpose of surveillance – regardless of era – was and continues to be the data collection that could serve specific objectives for specific entities. Another factor that has remained constant during centuries is represented by the major element that is targeted by the state surveillance: the individual (Crowdy, 2006; Hughes-Wilson, 2017; Andrew, 2018). Although the contemporary understanding of state surveillance went beyond the traditional perspective that was linked mostly to security objectives, the individual continues to be the most important actor in the process of surveillance. The latter can be supervised by the state's authorities in the moment he / she represents a threat for the national security. Here, state surveillance has one major purpose: to pinpoint in due time the threat, to obliterate it and to achieve security objectives (Warner, 2014; Andrew, Aldrich and Wark, 2020).

However, the individual cannot be associated solely with negative activities that make him / her prone to be subjected to the state's supervision but the latter can be supervised by the state for the solely purpose of the latter to improve specific marketing policies that would help some companies to strengthen their sale strategies. In this case, state surveillance has nothing to do which achieving national security objectives but is conducted in order to build efficient policies that would help individuals to make better decisions when it comes to choosing a specific product (Ball and Webster, 2003; Ball, Haggerty and Lyon, 2012). The relation between state surveillance and individual is not limited by the two aforementioned objectives, i.e. national security and strategic marketing but it can be also used for supervising different sectors of society in order to streamline policies or organizations or even to collect data regarding specific people in the country such as celebrities and politicians (Ball and Webster, 2003; Slobogin, 2007).

Following these lines of argumentation, the relation between state surveillance and individual cannot be neglected or diminished since both are interconnected, influence one another and does not really exist as individual factors. Large bodies of research explained the relation between individuals and state surveillance from the perspective of what make individuals to accept state surveillance and which should be the state institutions' policies, strategies and values in order to conduct efficient surveillance within the society. Accordingly, to date there are three major

bodies of research that explain this relation by focusing on: 1) institutional matters, 2) technological infrastructures and 3) specific contexts (Nakhaie and de Lint, 2013; Trüdinger and Steckermeier, 2017; Kininmonth *et al.*, 2018; Nam, 2019; Wester and Giesecke, 2019; Westerlund, Isabelle and Leminen, 2020; Viola and Laidler, 2022). All these bodies of research explain the relation between individuals and state surveillance by underlining that the latter is accepted due to external factors: institutional actions and values, technological efficiency or contextual threats. However, what all these bodies of research miss is represented by the fact that the acceptance of state surveillance is not explained by referring to the internal psychological mechanisms that make individuals shape perceptions regarding external realities – they only take external facts to explain what determines the acceptance of surveillance.

This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature by answering the research question: How the personality traits of individuals influence the acceptance of state surveillance? This is a relevant question since no study to date explained the role of internal mechanisms – that make individuals to shape perception towards external realities – when it comes to state surveillance. Here, state surveillance is not described by a holistic approach of the concept (since contemporary surveillance is a multi-faceted process that is used in many places and sectors of the society) but it is described as a process through which the state's institutions strive to achieve national security objectives. This definition is in line with the traditional understanding of state surveillance which wants to fulfil national security objectives. The personality of individuals is measured by using the Big Five Personality Traits since this is one of the more used taxonomies in social sciences.

To answer the research question, the thesis focuses on two cases: Hungary and Romania. The cases are analyzed comparatively by using the most similar systems design. Both countries are typical cases for studying the individuals' attitudes towards state surveillance because of several reasons (e.g. their authoritarian past, both are countries that strive to improve the quality of their democracies and they are not sufficiently analyzed in the literature of state surveillance). The data for the analysis is provided by two national representative surveys that were conducted between November-July 2022 in Hungary and Romania. The surveys were completed by roughly 1,000 respondents for each case. The data is analyzed by using quantitative approaches – statistical analysis (correlations, bivariate and OLS analyses).

The thesis has an introduction which is followed by six chapters and conclusions. Chapter 1 deals with the clarification of the concepts that represent the cornerstone of the book:

surveillance, perception and personality. It discusses the historical evolutions of state surveillance, its types as well as the features of contemporary surveillance and the most impactful theories that influenced the literature on state surveillance. After this, there are explained the other two concepts: perception and personality and the conclusions summarize the main finings. Chapter 2 focuses on the analytical framework of the thesis. It starts with a literature review that explained to date what determines individuals to accept state surveillance: 1) institutional matters, 2) technological infrastructures and 3) specific contexts. This discussion is followed by a general presentation of how personality could be linked with state surveillance and discusses possible elements that justify how the acceptance of state surveillance could be determined by the personality of individuals and after this it is presented the analytical framework. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to the conclusions.

Chapter 3 is divided between five sections which present all the methodological aspects of the thesis and conclusions and include a discussion about the most similar / different systems design it shows how Hungary and Romania fit in the category of the most similar systems design. After this, it is explained the relevance of the timeframe as well as the data for the analysis, how it was coded and analyzed. Chapter 4 discusses in detail the state of the art of intelligence sector in Hungary and Romania since the instauration of the communist regime in both countries until today. Chapter 5 is the first analytical chapter of the thesis and presents the case of Hungary while Chapter 6 does the same for Romania. The last chapter is dedicated entirely to conclusions and it presents the main results of the thesis, its empirical and theoretical contributions as well as is limitations and further research avenues.

This thesis has some relevant findings. First, it was revealed that most of the citizens in Hungary and Romania accept much and very much state surveillance. These results indicate that after more than 30 years from the breakdown of communism, citizens in Hungary and Romania left behind the authoritarian trauma inflicted by the repressive surveillance machineries in the authoritarian regimes and became open to the idea of accepting state surveillance. Moving to how personality traits influence the acceptance of state surveillance, the data found empirical support for some of the later. In both countries, conscientiousness has the strongest impact over the acceptance of state surveillance when we look solely to personality traits. In other words, an increase in conscientiousness influence an increase in the acceptance of state surveillance. Apart from this, in the case of Romania, extraversion plays a role in accepting state surveillance in the

sense that the more individuals are associated with this trait the more likely they are to accept state surveillance. Similarly, emotional stability – the opposite of neuroticism – influence the acceptance of state surveillance in the case of Hungary. In the moment individuals are characterized by emotional stability they are likely to accept more state surveillance. These results are important because they show the impact of personality traits over the acceptance of state surveillance for national security objectives.

Although the thesis shows that personality traits influence the acceptance of state surveillance for national security objectives, the statistical models underlined that other socio-demographic variables are likely to influence stronger this relation. Therefore, in both cases, the engagement in the community, subjective information and age influence the acceptance of state surveillance in the sense that the more individuals engage in the life of their communities, possess higher levels of information and have higher ages the more likely they are to accept state surveillance. These findings show indirectly that the acceptance of state surveillance is motivated by a combination of self-preservation instincts, care for their communities and high level of subjective information.

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