POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL AMONG IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES FROM NON-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES.
THE CASE OF ROMANIANS IN THE NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY-PENNSYLVANIA METROPOLITAN AREA OF THE UNITED STATES

By
ALINA VAMANU

A Dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Political Science
written under the direction of
Dr. Jan Kubik
and approved by

________________________
________________________
________________________
________________________

New Brunswick, New Jersey
January 2016
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Political Withdrawal among Immigrants and Refugees from Non-Democratic Regimes. The Case of Romanians in the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania Metropolitan Area of the United States

By ALINA VAMANU

Dissertation Director:
Professor Jan Kubik

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of a community of Romanian immigrants and refugees who spent decades under one of the most repressive Eastern European communist regimes before resettling in the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania metropolitan area of the United States. The study articulates the mechanisms through which their experience of political repression has led to political withdrawal in the United States.

Romanian immigrants and refugees have experienced both communist and post-communist Romanian politics as intrusive and destructive of community ties. Romanian politics reached beyond Romanian borders, infiltrated the émigré community in the United States, and gave rise to suspicions, political accusations, and arguments. These struggles have eroded Romanian churches and organizations, as well as people’s sense of a shared civic life. Romanian immigrants and refugees have also experienced American foreign policy toward Romania as harmful and unresponsive to their needs: in their view, it has been driven by strategic and economic reasons rather than a genuine concern for
democracy in Eastern Europe. Thus, Romanian immigrants and refugees have developed a negative understanding of politics. For them, politics is contentious. It is corrupt and invasive, and drives people apart instead of bringing them together to identify common goals and work as a group to attain them. As a result, most Romanian community leaders steer their churches and organizations away from political discussions and concerns and focus on “apolitical” (i.e., ethnocultural) activities and events. A few Romanian community leaders engage in politics, but they do so from an “independent” position in order to avoid affiliation with political parties or interest groups.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the invaluable suggestions and advice, constant encouragements, and sustained support of my thesis supervisor, Professor Jan Kubik. I am deeply grateful for his comments on my work, both at the initial stage of dissertation proposal development and later on, during fieldwork and chapter writing. Professor Kubik helped me design my study, articulate my research objectives, reflect on methodology, and clarify and sharpen my arguments, while always looking to move me forward in the process of dissertation writing.

I am also thankful to the members of my committee, Professors Beth Leech and Andrew Murphy from Rutgers University, New Jersey and Professor Anne White from University College London for their enlightening comments and suggestions, which have enabled me to strengthen my arguments both from a methodological and a substantive point of view.

The support of my family and friends has been decisive throughout these challenging yet rewarding years of doctoral studies. I am particularly grateful for the kind patience with which my husband Iulian listened to my thoughts as I began making sense of the data collected during fieldwork. Our debates late into the night were enormously helpful and resulted in some of the most significant insights of this dissertation. Also, Iulian’s willingness to read parts of my work and comment on them enabled me to articulate my ideas clearly and organize the material into a coherent narrative.

Last but not least, our two-year old son Oliver has been a constant source of joy and amusement during the final months of dissertation writing.
DEDICATION

To my loved ones
# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION ........................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION .............................................................................................................................................. v

LIST OF FIGURES ...................................................................................................................................... x

INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 1: STATE OF THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE: CURRENT FINDINGS AND
SHORTCOMINGS ........................................................................................................................................... 9

1.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose ...................................................................................................... 9

1.2 First Body of Scholarship: Pre-Migration Experience of Political Repression and Its Effects on Immigrant Political Integration in the Host Country ................................................................. 9

1.3 Second Body of Scholarship: Ethnic Communities and Civic Organizations as Breeding Grounds for Immigrant Political Engagement ......................................................................................................................... 24

1.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................... 34

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODS .............................................................................. 36

2.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose ...................................................................................................... 36

2.2 Research Objectives ...................................................................................................................... 36

2.3 Choice of Immigrant Group: Why Romanians? ................................................................................. 38

2.3.1 Communist and Post-Communist Romania as Country of Origin ........................................... 38

2.3.2 Two Recent Waves of Romanian Immigration to the United States ........................................ 39

2.3.3 Demographic Characteristics of Romanian Immigrants in the United States ......................... 40

2.4 Choice of Research Location and Identification of Community Boundaries: NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area, United States and Greater Toronto Area, Canada ......................................................... 41

2.5 Data Collection and Analysis ......................................................................................................... 43

2.5.1 An Ethnographic Approach ...................................................................................................... 43

2.5.2 Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 45

2.5.2.1 Participant Observation ....................................................................................................... 45

2.5.2.2 Document Collection .......................................................................................................... 53

2.5.2.3 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews ............................................................................... 57

2.5.3 Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 65

2.5.4 Dealing with Suspicion: Challenges of Ethnographic Research among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees .............................................................................................................................................. 69
2.5.5 Reflections on my role as a researcher.................................................................73
2.6 Conclusion ................................................................................................................75

CHAPTER 3: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ROMANIAN IMMIGRANTS AND
REFUGEES IN THE UNITED STATES: COUNTRY OF ORIGIN, WAVES OF
IMMIGRATION, AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS........................................76

3.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose..............................................................................76
3.2 Communist and Post-Communist Romania as Country of Origin: Non-Democratic
Governments and Weak Civil Society .........................................................................76
3.3 Two Recent Waves of Romanian Immigration to the United States: Political Refugees
(1945-1989/1990) and Post-Communist Immigrants (1990-present)............................96
3.4 Demographic Characteristics of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees: English Language
Skills, Education, Socio-Economic Status, and Naturalization Patterns.......................102
3.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................105

CHAPTER 4: “THEY ALL TURN THEIR BACK ON YOU…” COMMUNITY
FRAGMENTATION AND CIVIC DISENGAGEMENT AMONG ROMANIAN
IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN THE NY-NJ-PA METROPOLITAN AREA .............107

4.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose..............................................................................107
4.2 The Oldest Romanian Organization in New York: Struggles of a “Ghost Organization”
Returning to Life...........................................................................................................107
4.3 Community Fragmentation and Its Manifestations in Romanian Churches and
Organizations, and the Personal Lives of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees ..........117
4.4 Similar Patterns of Civic (Dis)Engagement among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees 133
4.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................................135

CHAPTER 5: “NO ONE KNEW WHO WAS INFORMING ON WHOM…” ROMANIAN
IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES’ EXPERIENCES OF INTRUSIVE POLITICS BEFORE
AND AFTER 1989 ........................................................................................................137

5.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose..............................................................................137
5.2 Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Accounts of Community Fragmentation: Stories of
Political Intrusions .......................................................................................................138
5.3 Experiences of Repressive Politics in Communist Romania ....................................142
5.4 Communist Repression beyond Romanian Borders: Political Invasions of Western
European Refugee Camps as Transitional Spaces .........................................................146
5.5 The “Long Arm” of Romanian Communism: Political Intrusions in the NY-NJ-PA
Metropolitan Area before 1989 ....................................................................................153
5.6 “Same Stuff Now as in the Past:” Political Intrusions in the NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area after 1989 ................................................................. 164

5.6.1 “They Are Still Around:” Concerns over Former Securitate Agents’ Continued Presence in the Romanian Emigré Community .................................. 165

5.6.2 “A Transition from Communism to Communism:” Experiences of Non-Democratic Post-Communist Romanian Politics among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees .......... 169

5.7 Witnessing American Foreign Policy before and after 1989: Ambiguity and Harm........... 180

5.8 Similar Experiences and Understandings of Romanian and American Politics among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees .................................................. 193

5.9 Conclusion .................................................................................. 195

CHAPTER 6: “WE DON’T DO POLITICS HERE…” POLITICAL WITHDRAWAL AND POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE AS STRATEGIES OF COPING WITH CONTENTIOUS POLITICS ................................................................. 197

6.1 Chapter Overview and Purpose .................................................. 197

6.2 Contentious Politics: A Review of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Negative Experiences and Understandings of Romanian and American Politics ......................... 198

6.3 Political Withdrawal: Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Primary Strategy of Coping with Contentious Politics ........................................................................ 200

6.4 Political Independence: Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Rare Strategy of Engaging in Contentious Politics ................................................................. 223

6.5 Similar Patterns of Political (Dis)Engagement among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees ................................................................................ 234

6.6 Conclusion .................................................................................. 237

CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 239

7.1 Dissertation Purpose and Main Findings ..................................... 239

7.2 Addressing the Research Objectives ......................................... 240

7.2.1 First Research Objective: Negative Experiences and Understandings of Romanian and American Politics among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees ....................... 240

7.2.2 Second Research Objective: Fragmented Community Ties among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees ........................................................................ 243

7.2.3 Third Research Objective: Romanian Political Refugees vs. Romanian Immigrants.
Similarities or Differences? .................................................................. 244

7.2.4 Tying Up Loose Ends: Modes of Political Withdrawal among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees ........................................................................... 247

7.3 Implications for Theory and Practice ........................................ 248
7.4 Limitations ................................................................................................................. 252
7.5 Future Research ........................................................................................................... 253

APPENDICES .................................................................................................................... 255

Appendix A: Call for Interviewees (English) ................................................................. 255
Appendix B: Invitație la interviu [Call for Interviewees (Romanian)] .................... 257
Appendix C: Interview Guide I. Organization Members (English) ......................... 259
Appendix D: Chestionar de interviu I. Membri de organizații [Interview Guide I. Organization Members (Romanian)] ................................................................. 259
Appendix E: Interview Guide II. Organization Leaders (English) .............................. 265
Appendix F: Chestionar de interviu II. Lideri de organizații [Interview Guide II. Organization Leaders (Romanian)] ................................................................. 268

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 271

Primary sources ................................................................................................................ 271
Secondary sources .............................................................................................................. 272
List of Figures

Figure 1: Number of Independent Organizations in Eastern Europe, June 1989. Source: Pehe (1989). Cited in Linz and Stepan (1996, 352)......................................................... 85

Figure 2: Romanian Immigration to the United States (1880-2009). Source: USDHS (2012) .................................................................................................................. 95

Figure 3: Number of European-Born in the United States (1960-2010). Source: Russell and Batalova (2012)........................................................................................................ 99
**Introduction**

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of a group of immigrants and refugees who spent decades under a particularly repressive Eastern European political regime—Romanian communism or totalitarianism-cum-sultanism as Linz and Stepan (1996) categorize it—before resettling in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area of the United States. The study articulates the mechanisms through which their experience of political repression in the home country has led to political withdrawal in the United States.

The dissertation contributes to scholarship in the area of immigration and integration. The bulk of North American research on immigration and integration has been devoted to the economic and social integration of immigrants to the detriment of their civic and political integration (Mahler and Siemiatycki 2011; Ramakrishnan 2005; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008; Waters 2008). For instance, Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad assert that the “immigrant adaptation literature in sociology and related fields has focused primarily on economic, demographic, and other social outcomes, with much less attention to political and civic institutions and processes” (2008, 3). Along the same lines, Waters discusses the need for increased scholarly focus on an “area of immigration research that is relatively understudied—the civic and political incorporation of immigrants and their children. Sociological studies of immigrant incorporation have, with only a few exceptions, tended to ignore politics in favor of a focus on social and economic incorporation” (2008, 105). As a result, the September 2011 special issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* was devoted to immigrant civic and political integration in North America in order to raise awareness of this research deficit and begin to address it. The
introduction to this special issue restates what has by now become a well-established fact: “A huge volume of scholarly work has examined immigrant integration from multiple angles; immigrants’ involvement in the political life where they resettle has received attention but not nearly as much as other aspects of integration” (Mahler and Siemiatycki 2011, 1124).

While immigrant civic and political integration is an underresearched topic, even less is known about the civic and political integration of immigrants from non-democratic countries (Bilodeau 2008). And yet, detailed scholarly studies of this category of immigrants are crucial for two reasons. First, concerns have been raised about the ability and willingness of today’s immigrants to integrate into the civic and political life of North American democracies. Critics of immigration (e.g., Huntington 2004) warn that recent newcomers from Latin America (particularly Mexico) and Asia are not equipped with the democratic political values necessary to maintain the quality of North American democracies. This argument is often couched in ethno-racial terms and has been heavily critiqued as ideological. However, immigrants from non-democratic countries may evoke similar concerns. Their situation raises the following questions: Do immigrants who have never experienced democratic politics at home learn to navigate North American civic and political institutions? Over time, do they become civically and politically active? If so, how does this happen? Or does their experience of non-democratic governments slow down their civic and political integration? If this is the case, what are the mechanisms through which their past experience influences their present behavior? Second, it is crucial to examine the civic and political integration of immigrants from non-democratic
countries not only because these immigrants raise concerns about the civic and political fabric of North American democracies, but also because they are important in their own right. All immigrants are politically vulnerable, but immigrants coming from non-democratic countries may be more vulnerable than others. Since they spent large sections of their lives under governments that either coopted or stifled civic and political activity, these immigrants might lack the inclination and the skills to make their voices heard in the public sphere.

The notions of civic and political integration need clarification. Immigrant civic integration is largely measured in terms of immigrant civic engagement. Immigrant civic engagement refers to involvement in voluntary activities oriented toward the common good and undertaken within associations outside the family, the market, the political sphere, and the state (e.g., ethnic associations, faith-based groups, youth groups, professional organizations, advocacy groups, sports clubs, and nonprofits among others). Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad define civic engagement as “involvement in communal activities that have some purpose or benefit beyond a single individual or family’s self-interest: either for a community organization, social group, or the general public” (2008b, 16). A few examples of civic engagement are membership in voluntary associations, participation in activities organized by voluntary associations (e.g., ethnic festivals and parades, religious celebrations, youth camps, professional meetings, advocacy, sports events, provision of social services), and monetary contributions to organizations promoting public causes.
To this notion of civic engagement, the dissertation adds an often neglected symbolic
level. As immigrants work together toward common goals, they interact and come to
understand their community and civic activity in particular ways. These modes of
interaction and shared understandings of community and civic activity are just as much a
part of immigrant civic engagement as the civic practices commonly discussed in the
scholarly literature.

Immigrant political integration is largely measured in terms of the rates and speed of
immigrant naturalization and immigrant political engagement. According to
Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad, immigrant political engagement refers to “involvement in
activities related to the formal political system, often with the intention of influencing
government policies and practices” (2008b, 16). There are conventional forms of political
involvement such as voting, running for office, developing party affiliations, participating
in political campaigns, and contacting public officials and unconventional forms of
political involvement such as participating in political protests.

To this notion of political engagement, the dissertation adds an often neglected
symbolic level. As immigrants become familiar with and involved in the political system,
they develop particular understandings of the world of politics and their political activity.
These shared understandings of politics and political activity are an intrinsic part of
immigrant political engagement.

An incipient but growing body of quantitative studies (Bilodeau 2008; Bilodeau and
Nevitte 2003; Bueker 2005; Pikkov 2011; Ramakrishnan 2005; Wals 2009) suggests that
immigrants from non-democratic countries lag behind other immigrants and the native-
born on most indicators of political integration (e.g., electoral participation, development of party affiliations, participation in protest politics). This trend is particularly worrisome because it persists for decades after resettlement. Of course, further research is necessary to develop new indicators of immigrant political integration and establish this correlation, but the majority of existing studies point in this direction. However, the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression leads to low rates of immigrant political integration in North America remain largely unexplored. The main objective of this dissertation is to articulate these processes. Since ethnic communities and civic organizations have become the main facilitators of immigrant political integration (Andersen 2008; Bloemraad 2006; Bloemraad 2011; Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008a), the dissertation looks at immigrants from non-democratic regimes within these environments to find out what prevents their political integration.

The dissertation argues that the main research objective is best accomplished by paying attention to the perspective of immigrants themselves. In order to understand why most immigrants from non-democratic countries fail to become active members of their new polities, scholars must strive to see the world of politics and civic participation through their eyes: How did these immigrants experience repressive politics in the home country? How does their experience of repressive politics differ from their experience of democratic politics in the host country? How do they see the world of politics as a result of these experiences? What kinds of communities do they form once they resettle in the host country? How do they see their communities and themselves as members of these
communities? How do their experiences and understandings of politics and community affect their political participation? To answer these questions, the dissertation uses grounded theory ethnography as advocated by Charmaz (2006). Through a mix of methods (participant observation, document analysis, and semi-structured in-depth interviews), it articulates the experience of repressive politics undergone by a group of U.S. immigrants and refugees, as well as the ways in which this experience has shaped their understandings of politics and patterns of civic engagement (i.e., civic practices, modes of interaction, and shared understandings of community and civic activities) and eventually led to political withdrawal in the United States.

The dissertation focuses on a group of immigrants and refugees who experienced a particularly repressive Eastern European regime—Romanian communism or totalitarianism-cum-sultanism as Linz and Stepan (1996) categorize it—prior to resettling in the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania metropolitan area of the United States. They came to the U.S. in two waves: one group came as political refugees during communism (1945-1989/1990) and the other group came as immigrants after the collapse of communism (1989-present). Since Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States organize annual ethnic conferences in cooperation with their counterparts in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, the dissertation traces these connections as well. It pays close attention to their voices and articulates the ways in which they make sense of political repression and bring it to bear on their civic and political lives in the United States.

In what follows, I present a brief outline of the chapters of the dissertation.
Chapter One reviews two bodies of scholarly literature relevant to this dissertation. The first body of literature uses quantitative methods to explore immigrants’ pre-migration experience of political repression and its negative effects on immigrant political integration in the host country. The second body of literature studies ethnic communities and civic organizations as facilitators of immigrant political integration. The chapter identifies findings and shortcomings of these two bodies of literature, and sets the ground for the current study.

Chapter Two presents the research objectives of the dissertation and the research methods it employs to accomplish them (participant observation, document collection, and semi-structured in-depth interviews). It also explains the choice of Romanian immigrants and refugees in terms of their country of origin, the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States, and their demographic characteristics. Moreover, it explains the choice of research location and identification of community boundaries. The chapter closes with a reflection on the challenges of ethnographic research among immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes.

Chapter Three offers background information on Romanian immigrants and refugees. It discusses the non-democratic political regimes governing Romania during communism and the country’s difficult transition to democracy. Also, the chapter presents the two waves of Romanian immigration to the United States: the political refugees of the communist period (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism (1990-present). Finally, the chapter discusses relevant
demographic characteristics of Romanian immigrants and refugees (English language skills, education, socio-economic status, and naturalization patterns).

Chapter Four explores the primary concern of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: community fragmentation. It articulates the ways in which this phenomenon manifests itself within Romanian Orthodox churches, Romanian organizations, and the individual lives of Romanian immigrants and refugees.

Chapter Five examines how Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area make sense of community fragmentation. Narratives of communist and post-communist Romanian politics reaching beyond home country borders and disrupting the lives of Romanian émigrés in the United States are prevalent. The chapter also discusses Romanian immigrants and refugees’ ambiguous experiences of American politics. It suggests that they see American politics as more democratic than Romanian politics in some respects, but also as hypocritical and harmful in others.

Chapter Six shows how Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences and understandings of politics have led to low levels of political engagement in the United States. It reviews their traumatic experiences of communist and post-communist Romanian politics in the home and host countries and their disappointment with American politics. Then, it explores the most prevalent strategies adopted by Romanian community leaders in response to contentious politics: political withdrawal and political engagement from an independent position.
Chapter One

State of the Scholarly Literature: Current Findings and Shortcomings

1.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter One reviews two bodies of scholarly literature relevant to this dissertation. Section 1.2 reviews the first body of literature, which uses quantitative methods to explore immigrants’ pre-migration experience of political repression and its negative effects on immigrant political integration in the host country. Section 1.3 reviews the second body of literature, which studies ethnic communities and civic organizations as facilitators of immigrant political integration. The chapter identifies findings and shortcomings of these two bodies of literature, and sets the ground for the current study.

1.2. First Body of Scholarship: Pre-Migration Experience of Political Repression and Its Effects on Immigrant Political Integration in the Host Country

An incipient body of literature investigates the civic and political integration of immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes. Most of this literature is quantitative and uses the simplest indicators of political integration: naturalization rates and voting participation. The propensity to naturalize measures newcomers’ commitment to the host country and their inclination to acquire full citizenship rights in order to engage in its political system as equal members. Voting participation measures newcomers’ willingness to turn out at the polls to express their political preferences and contribute to the election of government officials. To these obvious indicators of immigrant political integration, quantitative researchers have gradually added others: development of party affiliations, participation in various forms of political mobilization.
(e.g., signing petitions, attending public demonstrations, joining boycotts and strikes, occupying buildings), and support for democratic institutions.

The literature on immigrant political integration addresses a scholarly debate best summarized by Ramakrishnan (2005). On one hand, it has been hypothesized that immigrants and refugees from non-democratic backgrounds might be more likely than other immigrants to participate in host country politics because they are more aware of the importance of politics in their daily lives and appreciative of the multiple opportunities for political engagement afforded by democracy. On the other hand, the reverse could be true: immigrants and refugees from non-democratic backgrounds might be less likely than other immigrants to participate in host country politics because they are distrustful of the state and inexperienced in navigating democratic political systems.

So what does the literature show? Which of the two hypotheses is supported by evidence? Various survey-based studies have been conducted—some limited to just a few immigrant groups, others broader in scope—and a scholarly consensus is currently beginning to emerge. Data from multiple sources suggest that apart from naturalization rates, most groups of immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries tend to lag behind other newcomers and the native-born on most indicators of political integration.

As far as naturalization is concerned, scholars find that immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries acquire citizenship in greater numbers and at faster rates than other immigrants. An early study (Yang 1994) analyzes the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample of the 1980 U.S. Census and shows that immigrants from socialist and refugee-sending states are more inclined to naturalize in the United States than other immigrants.
This finding is confirmed by recent research. For instance, Bueker (2005) relies on data from the 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 Current Population Surveys to demonstrate that immigrants from non-democratic countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the former Soviet states, China, and Cuba) have been among the most likely to acquire U.S. citizenship. Along the same lines, Ramakrishnan (2005) analyzes data released in 2002 by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service and finds that immigrants from repressive regimes tend to become citizens more quickly than others. Moreover, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) use the 5% Public Use Microdata Sample of the 2000 U.S. Census to show that immigrants from the communist states of the Soviet Union and Vietnam display the highest naturalization rates (10 percent or more above average) of the 1980-1984 immigrant cohort. Virtually all these studies offer the same explanation for their findings: harsh political conditions made return difficult, if not impossible, for immigrants and refugees from repressive states; consequently, these people had strong incentives to naturalize and settle in the United States permanently. As Portes and Rumbaut put it, “the act of leaving their countries was a momentous, one-time decision with permanent settlement abroad the only alternative. Accordingly, four-fifths of Soviet-era Russians and Vietnamese opted for U.S. citizenship as soon as possible after their arrival” (2006, 146). In sum, there is extensive quantitative evidence that immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes tend to naturalize in greater numbers and more quickly than other newcomers because returning home is not a viable option for them.

But does this mean that they integrate well into their host country’s political system? The propensity to naturalize may be the most obvious indicator of immigrant political
integration, but it is by no means sufficient. It is true that newcomers must invest a significant amount of time and effort into citizenship acquisition: they need to spend a minimum of five years in the United States as permanent residents, prepare and submit their citizenship applications, pass English-language exams in American history and government, and go through an interview with immigration authorities. This complex naturalization procedure requires a great deal of commitment to the host country and willingness to integrate into its civic and political life, particularly since citizenship comes with the right to vote and run for elected offices as well as with other protections and obligations such as jury duty. However, citizenship acquisition is only a first step in the long process of adaptation immigrants and refugees must undergo in order to become competent and active members of their new polities. Moreover, those who come from non-democratic countries are practically forced to seek citizenship in the United States because they cannot return home. Since in these cases naturalization does not involve free choice, it may not be an entirely adequate measure of political integration. For these reasons, while naturalization remains the first and most obvious indicator of political integration, scholars must pay attention to a broader variety of forms of immigrant political engagement.

The simplest indicator of political engagement apart from naturalization is voting participation. What does the literature tell us about the voting patterns of immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes? An early study (Portes and Mozo 1985), which focuses on the political integration of ethnic minorities in the United States, relies on data provided by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Bureau of the
Census to argue that Cubans vote in greater numbers than other Hispanics. The article explains their high level of political engagement by indicating that they came to the United States primarily for political reasons. Cubans fled the repressive Fidel Castro regime to escape communism and rebuild their lives in a democratic environment. Once they settled in the United States, they knew that there was no way back to the island. As a result, Cubans have been eager to use American freedom to engage in political activity and make their political stance known, often against the communist regime at home. This finding is confirmed by Arvizu and Garcia (1996) who use data from the Latino National Political Survey to demonstrate that Cubans are more likely to vote than Mexicans and Puerto Ricans when controlling for age, education, employment status, income, and length of stay in the United States. Based on these findings, one could argue that the Cuban case supports the hypothesis that pre-migration experience of political repression leads to more intense electoral participation in the host country.

However, this hypothesis has been undermined by recent studies. For example, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) analyze data generated by the Current Population Survey November Voter Supplements from 1994, 1996, and 1998 and find that escaping communism increases the likelihood of voting participation among Cuban Americans, but decreases it among Vietnamese Americans. Given this dissimilarity between the voting participation rates of two groups of immigrants from communist countries (Cuban Americans and Vietnamese Americans), the authors conclude that results are mixed and pre-migration experience of repressive regimes does not have a consistent effect on immigrant voting participation in the host country.
As a result, the following questions arise: Is the intense political engagement of Cuban Americans representative of the electoral behavior of most immigrant and refugee groups from non-democratic countries? Or are Cubans a special case? In order to identify the “country of origin” effect on immigrant electoral participation, recent quantitative studies (Bueker 2005; Ramakrishnan 2005) have moved beyond limited comparisons of a few immigrant groups to investigate a broader variety of cases. Findings suggest that Cubans are, in fact, an exception: their voting participation is unusually high compared to that of other groups from repressive regimes. A combination of factors has been invoked in the literature to explain this trend. First, the context of reception has been particularly friendly to Cubans. Because communist Cuba is uncomfortably close to the American east coast, the United States perceived it as an imminent threat and advanced a forceful foreign policy against the Castro regime. At the same time, the U.S. government created a generous and long-lasting Cuban Refugee Program (1961-1973) to facilitate the relocation of Cuban exiles to south Florida and other regions of the country. Large amounts of money and various forms of support (e.g., resettlement funds, health services, education and training programs, employment opportunities) were made available to help Cubans adapt to life in the United States (Bueker 2005; Pedraza-Bailey 1985; Portes and Bach 1985). Second, certain group characteristics have set Cubans apart from other refugees as well. Early Cuban exiles displayed impressively high levels of human capital: many were well-educated, worked in professional and managerial occupations, and enjoyed social prestige. In addition, they settled in densely concentrated communities in the Miami area (Pedraza-Bailey 1985) and transplanted from Cuba a rich network of
organizations, which made significant efforts to mobilize members and obtain political power (Bueker 2005). Thus, the combination of a favorable context of reception and intense mobilization from within a socially well-positioned and tightly-knit community led to unusually high rates of voting participation among Cuban refugees. As Coleman puts it, “Cubans’ political activism and influence are unique among recently arrived refugees in this country” (1996, 115).

If Cubans are set aside as an exception, research indicates that pre-migration experience of political repression actually tends to depress immigrant voting participation in the host country. For instance, Ramakrishnan (2005) uses data generated by the Current Population Survey Voter Supplements from 1994 to 2000 to show that immigrants from repressive regimes, as well as those from the narrower set of communist regimes, are less likely to vote in the United States. Along the same lines, Bueker (2005) looks at the Current Population Surveys from 1994, 1996, 1998, and 2000 and finds that voter turnout among immigrants from non-democratic countries (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the former Soviet states, China, and Cuba) is about 25 percent to 40 percent lower than among other immigrants. Moreover, Wals (2009) analyzes the 2006 Latino National Survey and demonstrates that immigrants who were socialized in non-democratic states prior to migration are less likely to vote in American elections than immigrants who come from democratic states. The author concludes that “[i]mmigrants should not be treated as political blank slates. These individuals come to the United States with political suitcases, which are important, if not fundamental, components of their political behavior” (108-9). Recently, Pikkov (2011) has examined the 2002 Ethnic
Diversity Study conducted by Statistics Canada and found that immigrants from countries where democratic government is weak or absent (e.g., China, Hong Kong, Russia, Ukraine) are less likely to vote in Canada. This trend persists even after twenty years of residence. In sum, a significant corpus of quantitative research analyzing data from various North American sources supports the hypothesis that pre-migration experience of political repression decreases the likelihood of immigrant voting participation in the host country.¹

What is more, there are indications that low voter turnout may characterize the descendants of immigrants from non-democratic countries as well. For instance, Mollenkopf et al. (2006) conducted a multimethod research project on the political behavior of eight large groups of second-generation immigrants in the New York metropolitan area. Their findings show that Russians and Chinese are much less likely to vote than other second-generation immigrants and native whites, despite the fact that they are well-educated and work in professions. Mollenkopf et al. argue that these young people’s political disengagement is largely explained by their parents’ socialization under the Soviet and Chinese one-party regimes: specifically, they see politics as corrupt and refrain from participating because they were raised with family stories “about how

¹ A recent study (Bilodeau, McAllister, and Kanji 2010) analyzes data from the 2004 Australian Election Study and the 2005 Australian component of the World Values Survey and finds no evidence in support of the hypothesis that immigrants from repressive regimes are less inclined to participate in electoral activities such as discussing voting intentions, working for a party or candidate, attending a political meeting, and giving money to a party or candidate. This finding seems to question the rest of the literature on the electoral participation of immigrants from repressive regimes, which consistently shows that these immigrants are less politically involved than other immigrants and the native-born. However, the authors suggest that the results of their study may be due to the Australian system of compulsory voting. According to them, “[c]ompulsory voting could signal that not only voting but also other campaign activities are regarded as a civic duty, which could stimulate immigrants’ involvement and equalize the levels of participation with those of the rest of the population” (154).
attracting the attention of the authorities could lead to bad outcomes” (192). In sum, immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes—and possibly their children as well—turn out at the polls less frequently than other immigrants and the native-born.

But how do they fare on other indicators of immigrant political engagement? One such indicator used by scholars is development of party affiliations. Wals (2009) analyzes data from the 2004 Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation National Survey of Latinos and the 2006 Latino National Survey to show that immigrants from non-democratic countries are less likely to develop party affiliations in the United States than immigrants who were socialized in democratic political systems prior to migration.

Another indicator of political engagement used in the literature on immigrants from repressive regimes is participation in protest politics. According to Bilodeau (2008), protest politics encompasses the following activities: signing petitions, attending public marches and demonstrations, joining boycotts and strikes, and occupying buildings. This study analyzes data from the Canadian component of the 2000 World Values Survey and the 2004 Australian Election Study and finds that Canadian and Australian immigrants from repressive regimes tend to participate in protest politics less than other immigrants and the native-born. The gap is largest for something as simple as signing a petition: immigrants from repressive regimes abstain from signing petitions more than from all other forms of protest politics. Also, the more repressive the home country regime, the less inclined immigrants are to engage in protest politics in the host country. According to Pietsch and McAllister (2011), this pattern extends to the children of immigrants from repressive regimes: this study examines the 2010 Australian Election Study and finds that
the children of immigrants from repressive regimes display lower rates of participation in protest politics (operationalized as attendance of public meetings and rallies) than other immigrants and the native-born.

Yet another indicator of immigrant political engagement developed by scholars interested in immigrants from repressive regimes is support for democratic institutions. Bilodeau and Nevitte (2003) use various Canadian sources of data (the 1983 Immigrant Survey, the Canadian section of the 2000 World Values Survey and its sub-sample of recent immigrants called the New Immigrant Survey, as well as the 1993, 1997 and 2000 Canadian Elections Studies) to demonstrate that immigrants from repressive regimes display more trust in Canadian political institutions (i.e., the federal government, the parliament, political parties, and the civil service) than other immigrants and the native-born. However, this “honeymoon effect” experienced by immigrants upon arrival in a democratic country tends to wear off over time. A series of recent studies further qualify Bilodeau and Nevitte’s (2003) finding. For instance, Bilodeau, McAllister, and Kanji (2010) analyze the 2004 Australian Election Study and the 2005 Australian component of the World Values Survey and show that, while immigrants from repressive regimes display high levels of trust in democratic government, they are also more likely to support non-democratic forms of government (e.g., rule by the army and rule by a strong leader who bypasses elections and parliamentary decisions). In the authors’ own words, immigrants from repressive regimes “do not always see democracy as the only game in town” (2010, 154); they may support democracy, but they also support non-democratic alternatives to democracy. Bilodeau (2012) and Bilodeau and Nevitte (2007) have
replicated this study in Canada with similar results: Canadian immigrants from repressive regimes tend to consider non-democratic forms of government as acceptable alternatives to democracy. Moreover, Bilodeau and Nevitte (2007) find that the immigrants who support non-democratic forms of government have a more authoritarian conception of democracy. They are more likely to agree that religious authorities should interpret laws and that the army should intervene when the government is unable to rule effectively. Also, they are less likely to agree that leaders should be chosen by means of free elections, that civil rights protect individual liberties against oppression, and that people can change laws through referendums. In sum, the immigrants who support non-democratic alternatives to democracy give less importance to people’s voice and rights. But perhaps most worrying is the fact that the descendants of immigrants from repressive regimes seem to fare worse than their parents on support for democratic institutions. Pietsch and McAllister (2011) rely on the 2010 Australian Election Study to show that second-generation immigrants whose parents were raised under repressive regimes display lower levels of trust in Australia’s political, business, and media institutions than other immigrants and the native-born.

Having presented the scholarly literature on the political integration of immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes, let me briefly summarize the main trends. Quantitative data from a broad variety of sources suggest that these immigrants and refugees naturalize in greater numbers and at faster rates than other immigrants. But apart from naturalization rates, they tend to lag behind other immigrants and the native-born on virtually all indicators of political integration developed by researchers: electoral
participation, development of party affiliations, participation in protest politics, and support for democratic institutions. Of course, as mentioned above, the literature on the political integration of immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes is still in its early stages. Therefore, scholars working in this area need to develop further indicators of political engagement (e.g., showing an interest in politics, making donations to political parties, lobbying elected officials, participating in political campaigns, running for office) and determine how immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes score on them. While a great deal of research has yet to be conducted, most quantitative data collected for existing indicators of political integration point in the same direction: immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes are less likely to participate in politics than other immigrants and the native-born, and this trend persists decades after resettlement.

Clearly, this is not to say that immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes never engage in political activities. There are qualitative studies that demonstrate the contrary. An early book (Gold 1992) documents the political activism of Soviet Jewish and Vietnamese refugees in Northern and Southern California. Soviet Jews have created ethnic organizations to assert political identities and interests they see as distinct from those of American Jews. The most obvious example is party affiliation: Soviet Jews are politically conservative and identify with the Republican Party, whereas most American Jews are Democrats. As to Vietnamese refugees, they too have established ethnic organizations to build political power and demand that the U.S. government ramp up its fight against the communist regime in Vietnam and increase the flow of Vietnamese refugees to the United States. Wong (2006) explores forms of political participation in the
Chinese communities of New York and Los Angeles. While not as active as their Mexican counterparts, Chinese leaders do use their linguistic and ethnic knowledge to share information about naturalization and the American political system with other Chinese immigrants. Members of Chinese community organizations mobilize strikes and rallies to protest both systemic discrimination (e.g., violations of immigrant worker rights, racial conflicts, or anti-Asian police violence) and local problems (e.g., unwelcome construction projects imposed on Chinatown by the city of New York). Also, they lobby U.S. officials, organize voter registration drives, and support ethnic candidates to elected offices in order to enhance the political leverage of the Chinese community.

Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2008, 2012) are two other qualitative studies that explore the civic and political practices of Vietnamese refugees in the Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Members of Vietnamese voluntary associations may not be as engaged as Indian immigrants, but they do practice leadership and reach out to their community by organizing public events and offering courses of English as a Second Language, along with useful civic and political skills. In addition, they engage in both domestic and homeland politics: on one hand, they mobilize protests against the communist regime at home and lobby U.S. elected officials on behalf of Vietnamese concerns such as the need to stop human trafficking and political repression in Vietnam; on the other hand, they represent the Vietnamese community in the American media, organize voter registration drives and town hall meetings, and demand improved access to U.S. citizenship for Vietnamese immigrants.
In sum, immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes display several forms of political engagement. However, as mentioned above, quantitative studies demonstrate that these immigrants and refugees engage in politics much less than other immigrants and the native-born. As Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad put it, immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes are “less prepared to participate in politics” (2008, 5).

The most common explanation for their political withdrawal is non-democratic political socialization. This explanation has been offered in reference to both early and contemporary waves of immigration. Handlin (1973) is a historical study of Eastern and Southern European immigrants who arrived in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Handlin, these immigrants had difficulties engaging in the political life of the United States because they had not been socialized into democratic systems of government. In his own words, “[t]o many pursuits of the New World the immigrant was strange upon arrival; to politics he was strangest of all. His European experience had included no participation in government; every question related to these matters would be new to him” (180-1). In their home countries, turn-of-the-century European immigrants had been excluded from the election of state officials and decision-making processes. They knew that governments were run by powerful social classes (the nobility and the clergy) and often failed to represent their interests. As a result, these immigrants grew accustomed to distrusting and fearing the state and stayed away from politics. When they arrived in the United States, they brought political apathy with them.\(^1\)

---

\(^1\) Handlin’s (1973) account needs qualification. Recent studies indicate that many turn-of-the-century European immigrants had not been entirely excluded from political participation prior to migration. As a
Ramakrishnan (2005) argues that contemporary immigrants and refugees from non-democratic regimes illustrate the same pattern: non-democratic political socialization decreases their rates of political engagement in the host country. Most scholars of immigrant political integration agree with this explanation. According to the literature, immigrants socialized in non-democratic regimes have learned to distrust rigged or forced elections, as well as the politicians, political parties, and institutions of repressive states (Bloemraad 2006; Bueker 2005). They have also developed a lack of faith in the benefits of organized action (Bloemraad 2006) and a fear of speaking out in public, especially against public officials and the government (Bilodeau 2008; Harles 1993). Moreover, some of the immigrants who lived under repressive regimes for long periods of time have grown accustomed to non-democratic forms of government and do not view them as aberrations but as possible alternatives to malfunctioning democracy (Bilodeau 2014; Bilodeau, McAllister, and Kanji 2010; Bilodeau and Nevitte 2007). Even their values tend to revolve around political authority more than around people’s voice and rights (Bilodeau and Nevitte 2007). All these elements of non-democratic political socialization are imported into the host country and lower the likelihood of political integration among immigrants and refugees from repressive regimes. This trend is particularly worrying because it persists for decades after resettlement.

However, the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression results in lower rates of immigrant political integration in the host country remain unexplored. As Bilodeau suggests, case in point, the Austro-Hungarian Empire permitted voting (see, for instance, Rus 2008 on voting patterns among the rural population in Bukovina).
Future research must better understand how the socialization experiences that immigrants bring with them impact their adaptation to the host political system, especially at a time when newcomers in Western democracies increasingly come from countries where the social, economic and political contexts largely differ from that prevailing in their host countries. (2008, 998)

To address this gap in the literature, scholarship must focus on the perspective of immigrants themselves. We currently know little about how immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries make sense of their experience of political repression and bring it to bear on their current civic and political practices and on the meanings they assign to community life and politics in the host country. Such an inquiry would reveal the mechanisms that prevent these newcomers from becoming active members of their adoptive polities.

1.3. Second Body of Scholarship: Ethnic Communities and Civic Organizations as Breeding Grounds for Immigrant Political Engagement

As mentioned above, scholars of immigration and political integration need to illuminate the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression results in lower rates of immigrant political integration in the host country. But where do these processes commonly occur? To answer this question, it is helpful to look at a second body of literature, which deals with social groups and institutions that mediate between immigrants and the American political system.

Between the 1880s and the 1920s, political parties were active in mobilizing early waves of European immigrants. To secure immigrants’ loyalty at the voting booth, parties and politicians offered them a wide variety of benefits: they facilitated the immigrant naturalization process, helped immigrants to cope with life away from home, poverty, and low social status, provided them with jobs and social services, registered them on
party rolls, and encouraged them to vote in elections (Andersen 1979; Archdeacon 1983; Dahl 1961). As Jones-Correa puts it, “the locus of the mobilizing effort was the machine. It brought outsiders into the political system, and that process was initiated by political insiders, elites in the political parties” (1998, 71).

Over the course of the twentieth century, the political landscape gradually changed. Political parties no longer focused on mobilizing immigrants (Aoki and Takeda 2008; Jones-Correa 1998; Ramakrishnan 2005; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008b; Ramírez and Wong 2006; Wong 2006). Wong (2006) identifies three main causes of this phenomenon. First, the two political parties began operating at the national level. At the same time, urban political machines and local party organizations, which used to draw earlier waves of immigrants into the American political system, were on the decline for several reasons. A series of electoral reforms introduced during the first half of the twentieth century reduced local party control over ballot procedures and election outcomes. In addition, the expanding role of the federal government, the emergence of candidate-centered campaigns, and the use of new technologies to reach voters weakened local party organizations. As a result, party activists’ work of mobilizing voters (including immigrants) at the grassroots level was replaced by phone, direct-mail, and media campaigns. Second, selective voter mobilization strategies adopted by political parties took a toll on immigrants as well. To be efficient, parties began targeting those who were most likely to vote, i.e., English-speaking, educated, wealthy, and politically affiliated individuals. Since immigrants are less likely to fall under these categories, they tended to be ignored by political parties. Third, stereotypical assumptions about
immigrant political apathy and racist attitudes among white swing voters gave political parties no incentive to mobilize newcomers. In sum, “the national mainstream parties have largely ignored minorities and especially minority immigrants” (63-4).

Given that political parties are no longer interested in mobilizing immigrants, how do these people learn about and become involved in the American political system? Scholars have given two main answers to this question. First, ethnic communities have always been the most important social groups introducing immigrants to American politics. Until the 1960s, the expectation was that over time immigrants would abandon ethnocultural idiosyncrasies and assimilate into American culture. Gordon (1964) reviews the sociological and anthropological literature on immigrant assimilation produced between the 1920s and the early 1960s. During this period, the vast majority of scholarly definitions of assimilation referred to immigrants losing their ethnic distinctiveness and becoming “American” through a process of adaptation to the mainstream values and practices of the host society. Cultural homogeneity was the anticipated result. Gordon himself sums up the discussion as follows: “If there is anything in American life which can be described as an overall American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can best be described, it seems to us, as the middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins” (72).

However, assimilation has not unfolded as predicted and the assimilation paradigm in the social sciences came under attack with the advent of the civil rights movement. As early as the 1960s, Glazer and Moynihan (1963) questioned the “melting pot” view of American society which predicted that immigrants’ ethnocultural particularities would
grow less salient over time and ultimately disappear in a culturally homogenized society.
Contrary to this theory, the authors demonstrated that, in fact, ethnicity remained central
to New York City politics. Later on, Glazer and Moynihan (1975) edited a collective
volume on ethnicity, which brought further evidence in favor of this argument. As the
editors suggest in their introduction, ethnicity was the main focus of “group mobilization
for concrete political ends challenging the primacy for such mobilization of class on the
one hand and nation on the other” (18). Subsequent decades proved them right. At the
beginning of the 2000s, scholars came to agree that ethnicity had been much more
resilient than expected. As Alba and Nee explain, “[t]he assimilation concept of the
earlier era is now condemned for the expectation that minority groups would inevitably
want to shed their own cultures, as if these were old skins no longer possessing any vital
force, and wrap themselves in the mantle of Anglo-American culture” (2003, 1-2).
Similarly, Bloemraad suggests that “[w]hile immigrants might have various affiliations—
to other homebuyers, to other parents, to other soccer enthusiasts—ties based on ethnicity
are surely among the strongest and most deeply felt” (2011, 259). Indeed, ethnicity has
persisted as a combination of immigrants’ ethnocultural background and their reliance on
community solidarity in response to American political institutions and culture (Connolly
2006), particularly ethnoracial labeling by the state (Jones-Correa 1998) and
discrimination fueled by nativist anxieties (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 117-21). And not
only is ethnicity alive and well, it actually enables immigrant social and political
integration despite prevalent fears that newcomers who preserve their ethnocultural
distinctiveness might isolate themselves from American society and cause its
fragmentation. According to Bloemraad, ethnicity constitutes “a particularly effective way to organize for group ends” (2006, 240). Along the same lines, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) contend that past and present immigrants (i.e., turn-of-the-century Eastern and Southern Europeans and contemporary Asians and Latinos) have entered the world of American politics by articulating political interests along ethnic lines and supporting ethnic candidates running for elected offices. The authors state that “[e]thnic solidarity has provided the basis for the pursuit of common goals in the American political system: by mobilizing the collective vote and by electing their own to office, immigrant minorities have learned the rules of the democratic game and absorbed its values in the process” (167). In sum, ethnic communities continue to be considered the main social groups encouraging immigrants to become involved in the American political system.

Second, a young but burgeoning literature (Andersen 2008; Bloemraad 2006; Bloemraad 2011; Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012; Ramakrishnan and Bloemraad 2008a) identifies civic organizations (e.g., hometown associations, ethnocultural associations, religious organizations, nonprofits) as the most important institutions assuming the task of fostering immigrant political engagement in a context where political parties are no longer interested in or capable of mobilizing immigrants. Civic organizations do so in several ways. For instance, they provide immigrants with information about the civic and political life of their new country. At the most basic level, civic organizations offer newcomers courses of English and citizenship (Bloemraad 2006; Wong 2006). de Graauw (2008) looks at nonprofit organizations serving immigrants in San Francisco and concludes that such initiatives are important. As the author puts it, “[b]etter command of
the English language and a basic understanding of the American governmental process facilitate immigrants’ participation in local politics” (2008, 334). Similarly, Bloemraad (2006) gives the example of a Vietnamese association in Boston which organizes workshops and invites city officials to explain the mechanics of voting to the Vietnamese community. Wong (2006) shows that Chinese immigrants are less likely than Mexican immigrants to get involved in American politics because they find the system difficult to understand. However, those who choose to participate state explicitly that if Chinese organizations had not been around to help them, they would have had a hard time figuring out how American politics works. Indeed, a few Chinese ethnic voluntary organizations in New York and Los Angeles are instrumental in distributing materials about the American political system to their members. Along the same lines, Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2012) explore Indian and Vietnamese organizations in the Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth metropolitan area. The level of political engagement differs between these two immigrant groups, with Vietnamese refugees reporting less participation in formal U.S. politics than Indian immigrants. Nevertheless, in both cases, older and experienced organization members provide newcomers with information about American civic and political values such as participation in parent-teacher associations, community service through volunteering activities and charitable donations, and the importance of mobilization around issues of interest to the community and voting.

Besides teaching immigrants about the civic and political life of their host country, civic organizations give them the chance to develop civic and political skills. In their study of American civic volunteerism, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) argue that
participation in voluntary associations provides individuals with skills that are easily transferrable to the political sphere. People learn to communicate their ideas effectively and organize for shared causes, and thereby gain an advantage in politics. Immigrant organizations work in similar ways, even when their activities are not overtly political. Bloemraad (2006) gives the example of Portuguese youth theater groups in Boston, where immigrants learn to debate and coordinate events and develop strong connections to other members of their ethnic group. In several cases, this has led to deeper involvement in the Portuguese community and active participation in domestic politics. Along the same lines, Wong (2006) analyzes Chinese and Mexican community organizations in Los Angeles and New York and finds that organization members become well-versed in accounting, grant writing, public relations, and time and personnel management. All these skills can be put to good use for political purposes. Members also gain experience in organizing public events and contacting social service providers and government officials. Bloemraad, Voss, and Lee (2011) discuss the role of voluntary associations (e.g., churches, community-based organizations, ethnic media) in cultivating participatory habits and abilities among the Hispanics who took part in the massive immigrant rights rallies, protests, and boycotts of spring 2006. Another example is provided by Foley and Hoge (2007) who explore a variety of immigrant religious organizations in Washington D.C. (e.g., churches, mosques, and temples). According to the authors, these organizations are much more than worship communities. They often rely on volunteers to offer a wide range of services and organize events. For instance, one mosque holds classes for newcomers, parents, and spouses, counseling programs, conflict
resolution workshops, finance and tax workshops, fundraising events, and blood drives among other activities. All these initiatives give members the opportunity to develop organizational and leadership skills. Brettell and Reed-Danahay (2012) show that members of Indian and Vietnamese organizations in the Dallas-Arlington-Fort Worth area learn to overcome internal group differences and project the image of a unified community to the broader society. These cooperation skills have enabled them to come together for shared causes, draw the attention of public officials, and make compelling cases before them.

Civic organizations also engage in immigrant mobilization. Wong (2006) argues that civic organizations are well positioned to mobilize immigrants. They have every incentive to engage in outreach efforts in order to keep and expand their membership. In addition, they have strong ties to immigrant communities as well as a deep knowledge of their language, cultural practices, and policy interests. Indeed, civic organizations encourage immigrants to engage in conventional politics by applying for citizenship and casting their votes in elections (Bloemraad 2006; Brettell and Reed-Danahay 2012; Wong 2006). Also, civic organizations mobilize immigrants for non-conventional political activities such as demonstrations, protests, strikes, and boycotts (Cordero-Guzmán et al. 2008; Fox and Bada 2011; Heredia 2011; Martinez 2011; Ramírez 2011; Shaw 2011; Wong 2006). Wong (2006) studies Chinese and Mexican organizations in New York and Los Angeles and concludes that Chinese organizations are less political than Mexican organizations. Nonetheless, there are examples of politically active Chinese organizations. For instance, a Chinese worker center in New York has urged its members
to demonstrate for better wages. Likewise, Mexican religious associations in New York and Los Angeles involve their congregations in demonstrations for immigrant worker rights. Along the same lines, several case studies featured in a recent collective volume on the massive Hispanic rallies of spring 2006 (Voss and Bloemraad 2011) show that Spanish-language radio stations (Ramírez 2011), labor unions (Shaw 2011), Catholic churches (Heredia 2011; Shaw 2011), community-based organizations (Martinez 2011), and hometown associations (Fox and Bada 2011) were instrumental in mobilizing hundreds of thousands of immigrants to march in metropolitan areas across the country for immigrant rights and the dignity of undocumented workers.

Moreover, civic organizations provide immigrants with the opportunity to take up leadership roles, advocate for their communities, and run for elected office. Wang and Win (2011) show that Hispanic organizations and Spanish-language media are good training grounds for ethnic leaders interested in serving community interests. In 2006, Hispanic activists, community organizers, church leaders, and radio-based personalities convened to discuss anti-immigrant legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives and decided that mass action was necessary. Subsequently, they used their influence to mobilize large numbers of Hispanics who demonstrated for immigrant rights in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles among other urban areas. Similarly, de Graauw (2012) explores immigrant nonprofit organizations in San Francisco and finds that they foster immigrant leaders who have the skills and resources to enter the world of mainstream politics. Given extensive interactions between nonprofit organizations and the local government, immigrant leaders have the opportunity to learn about the
mechanics of government and the ways it can serve immigrant communities. In addition, immigrant leaders make themselves known in their ethnic communities and establish connections with government officials as well. As a result, they are particularly well positioned to engage in local politics and run for elected office, which they use to advance immigrant-friendly policies.

As the review of this second body of literature indicates, scholars agree that during the second half of the twentieth century political parties became uninterested in and incapable of mobilizing immigrants. In this context, newcomers’ integration into American politics has been ensured by ethnic communities and civic organizations. Ethnocultural attachments are particularly resilient and provide the basis for immigrants’ articulation of political interests, group mobilization, and support for ethnic candidates to elected office. Civic organizations foster immigrant political engagement by providing immigrants with information about the political system of their adoptive country, offering them opportunities to develop civic and political skills, engaging in immigrant mobilization, and giving organization members the opportunity to take up leadership roles, advocate for their communities, and run for elected office.

This body of literature has opened up new avenues of research, but from the point of view of the current study, it has a significant shortcoming: it says very little about the ethnic communities and civic organizations created by immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries. Overall, ethnic communities and civic organizations facilitate immigrant political integration. However, since immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries have difficulties becoming active members of their new polities,
ethnic communities and civic organizations may not work to their advantage as they do in other cases. We know little about why and how this occurs. Scholars need to examine these immigrants and refugees’ experience of political repression, as well as at the ways in which it informs the civic and political practices and the shared understandings of community life and politics they develop within their ethnic communities and civic organizations. This kind of inquiry is likely to reveal the mechanisms that unfold in these contexts and hinder political integration.

1.4. Conclusion

Chapter One has reviewed two bodies of scholarly literature relevant to this dissertation and identified their findings and shortcomings. Section 1.2 reviewed the first body of literature, which uses quantitative methods to explore immigrants’ pre-migration experience of political repression and its effects on immigrant political integration in the host country. This literature indicates that immigrants from non-democratic countries lag behind other immigrants and the native-born on most indicators of political integration, and this trend persists for decades after resettlement. However, the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression leads to low rates of immigrant political integration in the host country remain largely unexamined. Section 1.3 reviewed the second body of literature, which explores ethnic communities and civic organizations as facilitators of immigrant political integration in the host country. This literature has little to say about the ethnic communities and civic organizations created by immigrants from non-democratic countries. Normally, ethnic communities and civic organizations encourage immigrants to become politically active in the host country, but they fail to
help out immigrants from non-democratic countries. However, the reasons that ethnic communities and civic organizations do not serve as grounds for immigrant political integration in this case remain unclear. This dissertation aims to bring together these two bodies of literature and address their shortcomings. The immigrants and refugees under study were raised under a particularly repressive Eastern European political regime (Romanian communism) before resettling in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area of the United States. The dissertation examines their ethnic community and civic organizations in order to articulate the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression has resulted in low rates of political integration in the United States. Chapter Two presents a detailed account of the research objectives of this dissertation and the methods it employs to accomplish them.
Chapter Two

Research Objectives and Methods

2.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter Two presents the dissertation’s research objectives and the methods it uses to accomplish them. Section 2.2 outlines the main and subsidiary research objectives. Section 2.3 explains the choice of Romanian immigrants and refugees in terms of their country of origin, the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States, and their demographic characteristics. Section 2.4 explains the choice of research location and identification of community boundaries. Section 2.5 discusses the methods of data collection (participant observation, document collection, and semi-structured in-depth interviews) and data analysis (grounded theory). The section closes with a reflection on the challenges of ethnographic research among Romanian immigrants and refugees.

2.2. Research Objectives

The dissertation focuses on a group of U.S. immigrants and refugees raised under a particularly repressive Eastern European political regime, i.e., Romanian communism or totalitarianism-cum-sultanism as Linz and Stepan (1996) categorize it. The main research objective is to articulate the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression has resulted in low rates of immigrant political integration in the United States. Since ethnic communities and civic organizations have become the main facilitators of immigrant political integration, the dissertation looks at Romanian immigrants and refugees within these environments to find out what prevents their
political integration. Why aren’t ethnic communities and civic organizations doing their job of introducing these newcomers to democratic politics and enabling them to participate?

The subsidiary research objectives of this dissertation are as follows:

1. RO 1: Explore experiences of home and host country politics among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States. Also, identify understandings of home and host country politics developed by Romanian immigrants and refugees within their ethnic community and organizations in the United States.

2. RO 2: Identify patterns of civic engagement displayed by Romanian immigrants and refugees within their ethnic community and organizations in the United States. As indicated in the Introduction, this dissertation uses a broader notion of civic engagement than most of the literature on immigrant civic engagement: this broader notion of civic engagement includes civic practices, patterns of interaction among community and organization members, and shared understandings of community and civic activities.

3. RO 3: Explore whether Romanian immigrants who lived through the collapse of the repressive regime and a period of democratic transition at home display different experiences and understandings of politics as well as different patterns of civic engagement compared to Romanian political refugees who fled their home country during political repression. If so, inquire into consequences for immigrant political integration.
2.3. Choice of Immigrant Group: Why Romanians?

This dissertation looks at a group of immigrants and refugees who lived under a particularly repressive Eastern European political regime (Romanian communism) prior to resettling in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area of the United States. Since these immigrants and refugees organize annual ethnic conferences in cooperation with their counterparts in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, the dissertation traces these connections as well. This group of immigrants and refugees comprises representatives of two waves of Romanian immigration to the United States: the political refugees of the communist period (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism (1990-present). In what follows, I justify my choice in terms of country of origin, immigration waves, and demographic characteristics.

2.3.1. Communist and post-communist Romania as country of origin

The main reason I chose to study Romanian immigrants and refugees is their country of origin. Since I am interested in immigrants who lived under political repression prior to resettlement, I selected a country of origin that, according to Linz and Stepan (1996), experienced the worst non-democratic political regimes and their aftermath. Of the four non-democratic regime types identified by the authors (authoritarianism, totalitarianism, post-totalitarianism, and sultanism), totalitarianism and sultanism are the most repressive. The immigrants and refugees whose lives I became familiar with and shared for the duration of my research come from Romania, a country subjected to totalitarianism and sultanism for more than four decades (1945-1989). When communism collapsed in 1989, Romania began a long and rocky journey to democracy: it inherited governments with
strong non-democratic tendencies and a persistently weak civil society. Further details about Romania’s communist and post-communist periods are offered in Chapter Three.

2.3.2. Two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States

As mentioned above, the group of Romanian immigrants and refugees under study comprises representatives of two waves of Romanian immigration to the United States: the political refugees who came to the United States during communism (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism (1990-present).

The study of these two waves of immigration offers the following advantages. First, the wave of political refugees who escaped communism ended in 1989/1990. Conducting research among Romanian political refugees more than twenty years after the collapse of communism is particularly useful. The time lapse enables research participants to talk more freely about their experience of communist repression, their political views, and their community and civic activities in the United States. Before 1989, this would have been less likely. A researcher wishing to immerse herself in the ethnic community and organizations created by Romanian political refugees would have had difficulties establishing a relationship of trust with her research participants and encouraging them to share details about their lives in communist Romania and the United States. As I indicate in the section on data collection and analysis below, Romanians who experienced communism tend to be suspicious of new acquaintances and inquiries into their daily lives. They were raised under a regime that intruded on people’s privacy, often with devastating consequences for them and their relatives and friends. Moreover, fear of the regime did not end once they stepped on American soil. While communism lasted, many
were concerned that anything they said or did in the U.S. might jeopardize the safety of their loved ones back home. Even now suspicion of new individuals arriving in the Romanian community to collect information persists among Romanian political refugees, but people are no longer worried that their relatives and friends in the home country might incur punishment for what they say and do in the United States.

Second, studying an ethnic community that comprises representatives of two waves of immigration provides the researcher with an opportunity to observe if anything has changed from one wave to the next. Specifically, I am interested in finding out whether Romanian political refugees who fled communism and Romanian immigrants who were raised under communism but lived through the collapse of the regime and a period of democratic transition at home have developed different understandings of politics and different patterns of civic engagement. If this is the case, it is worth inquiring into the consequences of these differences for immigrant political integration. Further details about the two waves of Romanian immigration to the United States are offered in Chapter Three.

2.3.3. **Demographic characteristics of Romanian immigrants in the United States**

The third reason I chose to study Romanian immigrants and refugees consists in their demographic characteristics. The scholarly literature on immigrant political integration has established a strong relationship between immigrant language skills, education, and socio-economic status on one hand and immigrant political integration on the other hand: the higher the level of immigrants’ language skills and education and the better their socio-economic status, the more likely they are to become involved in host country
politics. Moreover, good language skills and education correlate with higher naturalization rates (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Of course, naturalization is an indicator of immigrants’ adaptation to the new political system as well as a predictor of more intense immigrant participation in host country politics.

According to studies using data generated by the U.S. Census and the Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the Current Population Survey (Costoiu 2009; Ispa-Landa 2007; Robila 2007, 2010), recent Romanian immigrants and refugees do well on all these aspects. Much like the majority of Eastern Europeans who came to the United States after the Second World War, they speak English well, have high levels of education, and are generally well-situated socio-economically. They also naturalize more quickly than other recent newcomers. Therefore, choosing this group of immigrants and refugees is particularly appropriate. No major factors prevent them from engaging in the political life of their host country except their background in one of the most repressive communist states in Eastern Europe. Thus, the researcher is able to focus on the topic of interest to this dissertation, namely Romanians’ experience of political repression and the ways in which this experience has informed their ethnic communities and organizations in the United States and affected their integration into American politics. More extensive details about this group’s demographic characteristics are offered in Chapter Three.

2.4. Choice of Research Location and Identification of Community Boundaries: NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area, United States and Greater Toronto Area, Canada

I conducted fieldwork among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area in the United States. Since they have ties to Romanians in the Greater
Toronto Area, Canada, I traced these connections as well. In what follows, I briefly outline the way in which I chose these research locations and identified the boundaries of the Romanian community I was interested in.

I started my fieldwork in New York City, location of the largest Romanian community during the two most recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States. Currently, New York City is home to 22 percent of all Romanians, followed by the states of Illinois with 14 percent and California with 12 percent (Ispa-Landa 2007). Most Romanians in New York City live in Queens in the neighborhoods of Astoria, Sunnyside, and Ridgewood, while only insignificant numbers live in Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. All Romanian restaurants, bakeries, cafés, and media outlets (a television channel and a newspaper) and most Romanian churches and organizations operate in Queens. Only the Romanian-American Chamber of Commerce, one Romanian Orthodox church, and the Romanian student club of Columbia University are located in Manhattan.

During my fieldwork, I found out that Romanians in New York City maintain close ties with Romanians in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. One of the two Romanian priests serving in the Romanian Orthodox church in Manhattan said that he often visits the Romanian Orthodox church in Elkins Park, PA to help with the service, particularly on important holidays such as Christmas and Easter. He urged me to get to know that parish as well. From there, I was led to other Romanian churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as well as to a Romanian non-profit organization and ethnic museum with branches in Philadelphia, PA and Princeton, NJ.
Moreover, several Romanians in New York (priests, organization leaders, and a journalist) informed me that every year they and many of their friends and acquaintances go on a week-long trip to visit the Romanian community in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. The purpose is to participate in an annual conference on topics of interest to Romanians in North America. The gathering place is a natural park near Hamilton, ON owned by the Romanian community in the region.

I relied on the help of my research participants to trace the ramifications of the Romanian community in New York City to New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the United States and the Greater Toronto Area in Canada. Thus, I identified the extent and boundaries of this ethnic community as Romanian immigrants and refugees themselves understand them rather than based on demographic data alone.

2.5. Data Collection and Analysis

2.5.1. An ethnographic approach

The dissertation’s research objectives can best be accomplished through an exploration of the perspective of Romanian immigrants and refugees themselves, as manifested within their ethnic community and organizations. The dissertation seeks to articulate Romanian immigrants and refugees’ experience of repressive politics and the ways in which it has shaped their political views and patterns of civic engagement (i.e., civic practices, modes of interaction, and shared understandings of community and civic activities) eventually leading to political withdrawal in the United States.

Thus, the dissertation takes seriously political ethnographers’ suggestion that “close person-to-person contact that is attuned to the worldviews of the people we study is invaluable for a science of politics” (Schatz 2009). Political ethnography has long been
marginalized in political science but is currently experiencing a revival among researchers who recognize that social and political life is endowed with meaning by the actors participating in it (Aronoff and Kubik 2013; Auyero and Joseph 2007; de Volo and Schatz 2004; Schatz 2009; Wedeen 2002, 2009). Wedeen defines meaning as “the economy of signs and symbols in terms of which humans construct, inhabit, and experience their social lives (and thus act in and upon the world)” (2009, 81-2). Put differently, human beings assign meanings to their social and political world and thus not only situate themselves within it, but also act in the world and reshape it in virtue of these meanings. Hence, meaning-making processes are essential to social and political action and outcomes. It is to these meanings or “insider viewpoints” (de Volo and Schatz 2004; Schatz 2009) that political ethnography pays close attention. As Auyero and Joseph put it, this mode of inquiry is “ideally suited to explain why political actors behave the way they do and to identify the causes, processes, and outcomes that are part and parcel of political life” (2007, 2).

The dissertation is based on grounded theory ethnography as advocated by Charmaz (2006). She argues that “[g]rounded theory ethnography gives priority to the studied phenomenon or process—rather than to a description of a setting” (22). Since the goal of my dissertation is to study the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression prevents immigrant political integration in the host country, grounded theory ethnography is a particularly useful methodological approach.

According to Charmaz, this methodological approach aims at theoretical development by “raising description to abstract categories and theoretical interpretation” (23). In other
words, ethnographic description is insufficient in itself. The goal of the researcher is to identify categories emerging from descriptive material collected during fieldwork and use them to organize the data. These categories are put together into coherent narratives, or theoretical analyses. This is achieved through a back and forth movement between data and analysis. As Charmaz explains, grounded theory ethnographers usually follow three main steps in the course of their research: they constantly compare new data with data from the beginning of the research, compare data with emerging categories, and attempt to find relations between concepts and categories (23). In my dissertation research, I proceeded along similar lines: I engaged in data collection while at the same time attempting to produce tentative theoretical analyses, which I then checked and refined through further data collection.

In what follows, I present my methods of data collection (participant observation, document collection, and semi-structured in-depth interviews)

2.5.2. Data collection

2.5.2.1. Participant observation

Between March 2010 and August 2011, I conducted participant observation at Romanian restaurants in New York, two Romanian organizations (a charitable/religious organization with a strong ethnocultural component in New York and a beneficial society in Elkins Park, PA), and two Romanian Orthodox churches (one in New York and one in Elkins Park, PA). I also paid several visits to most Romanian organizations and Romanian Orthodox churches in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in order to get to know their members and familiarize myself with their practices and rituals. In addition, I attended various community events such as ethnic festivals and an annual
conference hosted by the Romanian Cultural Association in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. In what follows, I describe my participant observation in more detail.

In March 2010, I started my fieldwork by immersing myself in the Romanian community in New York. From there, with the help of my research participants, I expanded my research to the states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania and the Greater Toronto Area, Canada.

In New York, there are three Romanian restaurants and one Romanian bakery, all located in Sunnyside, Queens and one Romanian café located in Ridgewood, Queens. There are also sixteen Romanian organizations and churches which I identified using data provided by the Consulate General of Romania in New York and the Romanian Embassy in Washington, D.C.: three ethnocultural organizations, two religious/charitable organizations, four professional organizations (three business associations and a medical association), a student association (the Romanian Club of Columbia University), and six Romanian Orthodox churches. Most of these organizations and churches are located in Queens, while only the Romanian-American Chamber of Commerce, the Romanian Club of Columbia University, and one Romanian Orthodox church are located in Manhattan. Thus, the Romanian community of New York is most active in Queens, with just a few organizations and churches operating in Manhattan.

I went to Romanian restaurants often (between once and several times a week) from March 2010 to June 2011. This is where ethnic Romanians gather to spend time with family and friends, to speak their native language, and to enjoy traditional dishes, a variety of goods imported from the home country, and Romanian-language television.
programs. Over time, I came to the conclusion that Romanian restaurants are much more than dining places. In fact, they would more suitably be seen as ethnic clubs. Many of their patrons are long-time customers who know the restaurant owners and their spouses well. When they come to Romanian restaurants, they do not just have lunch or dinner with a few close relatives or friends and then leave. Rather, they feel at home there: many read the latest issue of the Romanian newspaper laid out on a shelf at the entrance, watch Romanian television, walk around the room to greet acquaintances and waiters, converse and share news and information for extended periods of time, and sometimes enter the kitchen to exchange a few familiar words with the restaurant owner and cooks. The owners, in turn, put their venues at the disposal of community members for various private and community gatherings such as celebrations of engagements, marriages, and baptisms or ethnic festivals, music concerts, talks, interviews, conferences, and book launches.

I also conducted participant observation at Romanian organizations and churches. I began by contacting all the Romanian organizations and churches in New York and found the presidents of ethnocultural and religious/charitable organizations and the priests to be the most responsive and welcoming. I visited the nine organizations and churches from which I received answers in order to get to know their members and familiarize myself with their practices and rituals. Subsequently, I settled on one charitable/religious organization with a strong ethnocultural component and one church to conduct more intensive fieldwork, because their leaders were willing to allow me to participate in their activities over the long term (between March 2010 and June 2011).
The organization I studied presents itself as a Romanian Christian Society with a threefold mission: morality, culture, and philanthropy. It is one of the most active Romanian organizations in New York: unlike other organizations, it does a great deal of outreach work with Romanians in the city, communicates regularly with other Romanian organizations, churches, and ethnic media, and was present at all the major community events I attended during my research. This organization has over ninety registered members, but I met and spent most of my time with six of them. This may seem like a small number, but the six members were the only persons who actually participated in meetings and volunteered to help with organizing activities such as folk festivals, traditional songs and dances performed during immigrant parades, and booths featured at ethnic events. I attended organization meetings and witnessed their decision-making processes around the organization’s agenda and task distribution for various events. I was also present at the yearly election of the organization president. In addition, I accompanied the members of this organization to festivals and ethnic events and helped them set up and take down their booths. Moreover, I assisted the organization president with putting together an application to have his organization affiliated with the United Nations. Besides this organization, I also conducted fieldwork at a Romanian Orthodox church in New York. I attended Sunday mass regularly and after service I always made sure to talk to the two priests and spend time with as many parishioners as possible in the social room of the church. In addition, I took part in the meetings of the parish council, whose members make the most important decisions regarding the life of the church and various social and religious events such as ethnic gatherings and holiday celebrations.
Going to Romanian restaurants regularly and immersing myself in the activities of the Romanian Christian Society and Romanian Orthodox church in New York opened up other research possibilities for my study. One of the two priests at the Romanian Orthodox church in New York told me that he often went to a Romanian Orthodox church in Elkins Park, PA to help with the service, particularly on important holidays such as Christmas and Easter. He urged me to visit this church as well and introduced me to the priest. Subsequently, I found out that a Romanian beneficial society called the “Bănățeana” Romanian-American Cultural Society operated on church grounds as well. The priest and parishioners agreed to allow me to participate in their activities for research purposes over the long term, so I split my time between New York and Elkins Park, PA. I conducted fieldwork at the church and the “Bănățeana” society affiliated with it between May 2010 and June 2011. I attended Sunday mass regularly and after service I always joined the priest and the parishioners in the social room of the church, where they usually spend one to two hours having coffee and light snacks and chatting about personal and community affairs. I also attended the meetings of the parish council during which members talk about practical issues related to the church and the organization of upcoming events. Moreover, I participated in most of the community events organized on church grounds: Christmas and Easter lunches and dinners, religious holidays, the yearly celebration of the church anniversary, and ethnic festivals. As to the beneficial society affiliated with the church, I sat in on the meetings of its steering committee and witnessed their decision-making processes regarding membership, donations, and participation in community activities. The society also maintains a small Romanian ethnic museum in
one of the church rooms. I visited this museum accompanied by three of the most prominent society members and benefited from their comments on various items such as photographs, albums, documents, and folk costumes. The society members also told me stories about the church, the various priests who have served there over time, and the life of the parish.

Several parishioners and society members from Elkins Park, PA indicated two other Romanian Orthodox churches in Philadelphia, PA and Roebling, NJ with which they have close ties. They also informed me about the existence of a Romanian non-profit organization and ethnic museum with branches in Philadelphia, PA and Princeton, NJ. I visited these venues several times and gathered as much information as possible about them by attending Sunday mass at the churches, participating in parish get-togethers after service, and engaging in conversation with the priests, the church members, and the president of the non-profit organization and ethnic museum. However, I did not conduct long-term participant observation at these locations.

Besides restaurants, organizations, and churches, from June 2010 to July 2011 I also conducted participant observation at various community events. As mentioned above, most community events are organized by Romanian organizations and Romanian Orthodox churches either at Romanian restaurants or in their own buildings. I attended such events as part of my participant observation at the two Romanian organizations and the two Romanian Orthodox churches in New York and Elkins Park, PA. However, I also participated in other community events organized by independent members of the Romanian community in New York and by various institutions such as ethnic
newspapers, ethnic businesses, and the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York. The most prominent event was the Romania Day Festival held in New York in May 2011. This is a day-long annual event which draws around 20,000 people. It takes place on Broadway between Fulton Street and Battery Park and features a variety of booths displaying traditional arts and crafts, ethnic foods, books and digital recordings by and about Romanians, recent issues of Romanian newspapers, as well as flyers and promotional materials advertising Romanian businesses, organizations, and Orthodox churches in New York and neighboring states. Folk songs and dances performed on a central stage are periodically interrupted by greetings and speeches delivered by the festival organizer and other guests of honor such as Romanian and American politicians and businessmen. I spent the entire day walking from one booth to the next, examining the displays, engaging in conversation with the Romanian vendors and their visitors, and watching the performances and speeches on stage. I also helped an independent Romanian artist who had a booth at the festival. I watched over her materials while she was gone for extended periods of time, gave information and showed various items to interested passers-by, and assisted with packing at the end of the day. This gave me the chance to interact with the Romanian artist and her customers, as well as with the Romanian vendors next to her booth. Another important ethnic event I attended was a week-long conference organized in July 2011 by the Romanian community in NY-NJ-PA, in collaboration with the Romanian community in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada. Many Romanians from NY-NJ-PA (presidents and members of Romanian organizations, Romanian Orthodox priests, journalists, and regular Romanian immigrants and refugees)
go on an annual trip across the Canadian border to participate in this conference.

Presentations and discussions focus on topics of interest to Romanians in North America: Romanian identity in the United States and Canada, Romanian spirituality and Orthodox religion, Romanian literature, history, and folk traditions, and to a much lesser extent contemporary Romanian politics. Besides participating in panels, round tables, and debates, participants also organize religious services, poetry recitals, community meals, as well as outings and picnics and spend their free time together chatting and sharing information. I spent the week attending most of the conference events and informal activities mentioned above. During this time, I made sure to talk to as many participants as possible, ask questions, and listen to their stories. In addition to the Romania Day Festival on Broadway and the annual Romanian conference held in the Greater Toronto Area, Canada, I also participated in smaller events such as book launches, art performances, spontaneous get-togethers and conversations, home visits, short car rides, and wine and music nights at New York clubs.

Going to Romanian restaurants regularly, immersing myself in the life of Romanian organizations and Orthodox churches, and attending community events and get-togethers enabled me to meet many Romanian immigrants and refugees and become familiar with their civic and political life. I paid close attention to the ways in which Romanians make sense of past communist political repression and to their views of Romanian and American politics before and after 1989. In addition, I observed their civic practices and interactions and sought to capture the meanings they attach to their ethnic community and civic activities in the United States.
2.5.2.2. Document collection

Between March 2010 and August 2014, I collected several kinds of documents produced by Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. First, I collected media documents, particularly the most widely read Romanian newspaper and the only Romanian-language television in New York. Second, with the help of various persons I met during fieldwork and through my own research on the internet, I collected organization documents such as restaurant flyers, organization mission statements, charts, web sites, and videos, as well as church pamphlets and newsletters produced in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. Third, I collected online documents such as conversations available on the online forum of the Romanian community in New York and blogs created by Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. Finally, I collected articles, essays, and books of memoirs written by Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

In what follows, I offer a detailed description of the documents I collected for my project and the ways in which I found them.

Most of the Romanians I encountered during fieldwork mentioned New York Magazin as the community newspaper of choice for themselves and their acquaintances, friends, and relatives. According to the Consulate General of Romania in New York, this newspaper operates in Middle Village, Queens and has been in business since 1997. New York Magazin is the only weekly newspaper of the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. It is also the only newspaper available at Romanian restaurants in New York and advertized at the yearly Romania Day Festival on Broadway. I selected the articles referring to Romanian and American politics and to the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area and the broader North America published between
1997 and 2014. I mostly relied on an annotated history of the newspaper (Burlacu and Burlacu 2012), which groups all the articles published between 1997 and 2012 under nineteen categories. The most useful categories were: “Editorials” (with the subcategories “Politics”, “Arts and Culture”, “Community Events”, and “Open Letters”), “Romanian Politics”, “American Politics”, “The Romanian Diaspora”, “Cultural and Artistic Life”, “Literature”, and “The Church”. I regrouped the articles under these categories to fit my research goals: the articles under the categories “Editorials” (“Politics” and “Open Letters”) and “Romanian Politics” refer mostly to Romanian politics; the articles under the category “American Politics” refer to American politics; finally, the articles under the categories “Editorials” (“Arts and Culture” and “Community Events”), “The Romanian Diaspora”, “Cultural and Artistic Life”, “Literature”, and “The Church” refer to the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area and the broader North America. However, there is one limitation to my research: the first issue of New York Magazin came out seven years after the collapse of communism in Romania, so the newspaper does not cover the communist period and the first years of the post-communist period. Various Romanian immigrants with whom I discussed during fieldwork and some of my interviewees mentioned another Romanian newspaper called Lumea Liberă [Free World], which was issued in New York between 1988 and 2005. This newspaper covered one year of communism and the first fifteen years of the post-communist period. I tried to find it and talked to several persons who had actively contributed to it, but nobody was able to tell me whether the archive of the newspaper still exists and if so where it is
located. One interviewee who had been well acquainted with the editor of the newspaper suggested that the archive was lost when this person passed away.

Many persons I encountered during fieldwork also mentioned Romanian Voice Television, which broadcasts weekly half-hour shows in Romanian on WNYE-TV. According to the Consulate General of Romania in New York, this Romanian-language television operates in Sunnyside, Queens and has been in business since 1990. It has a web site featuring video documents of its TV shows from 2008 to the present. Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to meet the owner of Romanian Voice Television during fieldwork and he did not respond to my meeting request. As a result, I relied on the online archive of Romanian Voice Television and on the interviews its owner gave to various newspapers in order to get a sense of the goals and content of these TV shows. I collected the videos referring to Romanian and American politics and to the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area and the broader North America.

With the help of various persons I met during fieldwork and through my own research on the internet, I also collected organization documents such as restaurant flyers, organization mission statements, charts, and web sites, and church pamphlets and newsletters. In addition, one person with whom I became well acquainted during fieldwork and who is the president of the Romanian Christian Society in New York gave me video documents of a series of ethnocultural events sponsored by his organization, namely fall festivals and meetings of members of the Romanian community at ethnic restaurants. In these documents, I looked for references to Romanian and American
politics, as well as for information about organization and church members, organization goals, and community events and activities organized at various ethnic venues in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

Moreover, I collected online documents such as conversations available on the online forum of the Romanian community in New York and blogs created by Romanians living in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. The forum conversations are organized by topic. Several topics refer to the Romanian community in New York and were, therefore, of interest to this dissertation: “Chat Away! The New York Café,” “Events (Events and News about the Romanian Community in New York),” “Business (Discussions about Business in New York),” and “Romanian Churches in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut (News about the Romanian Orthodox Community in the New York Metropolitan Area).” In these forum conversations and blog posts, I looked for information about Romanians living in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, particularly details about their experiences and views of Romanian and American politics and their community interests and activities, interactions, and shared understandings of community and civic life.

Finally, I collected publications by Romanians living in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area such as journal articles, essays, books of memoirs, and studies of exile, most of which have been written by Romanian political refugees. I paid attention to Romanian immigrants and refugees’ experiences and views of Romanian and American politics, as well as their participation in events and activities organized by Romanian Orthodox
churches and Romanian organizations, interactions, and understandings of the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

2.5.2.3. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Between May 2010 and August 2011, I conducted forty-two semi-structured in-depth interviews with Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

The semi-structured in-depth format of the interviews worked well for several reasons. First, it allowed me to develop specific questions focused on topics of interest to my research project (see below the clusters of interview questions and the topics they address). This enabled me to check and explore in further detail important insights I acquired during participant observation and document analysis. Second, this format was open-ended and flexible enough to encourage my informants to provide detailed discussions of their memories and current civic and political lives in their own words, without imposing exogenous categories on their experience (Charmaz 2006, 32-3; Fontana and Frey 2003, 78). As Warren puts it, the qualitative interview is a “guided conversation” whose aim is to “understand the meaning of respondents’ experiences and life worlds” (2002, 83). Third, the format of the interviews enabled me to use the interview questions as starting points, while at the same time looking for “unexpected turns or digressions that follow the informant’s interests or knowledge” (Johnson 2002, 111). Such deviations were particularly fruitful for my research because they took the conversation in unanticipated directions and uncovered important information. For instance, I would not have thought of asking my informants about their relationship with Romanian political representatives on American soil, but I soon realized that most of them wanted to talk about this issue. Listening to these digressions led to one of the most
important findings of my research project, namely that repressive politics is not confined
to the home country but extends its influence into the host country and continues shaping
the lives of immigrants and political refugees.

In what follows, I describe my informants and the ways in which I selected them.
Then, I describe the process of designing and conducting the interviews. Field immersion
was crucial to the process of selecting my informants and designing and conducting the
interviews.

My informants included thirteen community leaders (five organization presidents, six
Orthodox priests, and two journalists) and twenty-nine members of Romanian
organizations and parishes. Five community leaders were “key informants.” According to
Johnson, a key informant is a “reflective inside informant who seems to know just about
everything that seems to be important and has thought about it and reflected on it for
some considerable period of time before he or she ever meets an ethnographer or does an
in-depth interview” (2002, 110). The five community leaders who served as my key
informants are very active in their organizations and the ethnic community as a whole:
they organize events, find the necessary resources to keep their organizations going,
mobilize people to participate in organization activities, and are present at most
community events. These persons were valuable informants because they are
knowledgeable, reflective, and articulate, and all of them were willing to be interviewed
more than once. In fact, I spent hours and days on end discussing with three of my five
key informants and they provided a wealth of information. Of course, I made sure to
check their claims against my own field observations, relevant documents, and the opinions of other informants (Johnson 2002).

While working in the field, I found that the vast majority of Romanians active in ethnic organizations, Orthodox churches, and community events were middle-aged and elderly persons. Younger Romanians rarely become regular members of Romanian churches and organizations and are much less involved in ethnic activities. I almost never saw the same twenty-year-olds or thirty-year-olds twice at organization events, Sunday mass, or Romanian festivals. This observation was confirmed by several organization presidents and priests. Organization presidents often complained about how difficult it is for them to attract young energetic Romanians to their organizations. This situation leaves them in the undesirable position of having to work with elderly persons who, in their view, are too focused on the past to try anything new. Priests voiced similar concerns about their parishes: young Romanians come to church only rarely, usually for important holidays like Christmas or Easter, but do not join the community of believers. This worries priests because they find themselves unable to count on a continuous flux of new parishioners and see their parishes grow old and dwindle with the passing away of elderly members. According to them, this happens for two reasons. On one hand, young Romanians are often students who do not expect to reside in the same city or town once they graduate and therefore have fewer reasons to commit to churches over the long term. On the other hand, these young people are more interested in becoming good professionals and acquiring decent jobs than in attending church services and socializing with their co-ethnics. As a result, it is middle-aged and elderly Romanians who constitute
the bulk membership of Romanian organizations, Orthodox churches, and the broader ethnic community in the United States. These people spent large sections of their lives under communism—at least until eighteen years of age, but usually much longer, until their thirties and forties. They experienced repressive politics well into their youth and adulthood, and remember it distinctly. My informants reflect this age distribution and experience of repressive politics. When I conducted the interviews in 2010-2011, the majority were middle-aged and elderly individuals between thirty-eight and eighty years of age, with just three persons in their twenties and early thirties. They spent their youth and adulthood under communism and have many stories to tell about political intrusions in their private lives.

I also made another observation in the field. While most of the members of Romanian Orthodox churches, organizations, and the broader ethnic community lived under the repressive Romanian regime well into their mature years, they came to the United States in two different waves: some fled Romania before the 1989 collapse of communism or immediately afterwards and resettled in the U.S. as political refugees; others left Romania after 1989 and came to the U.S. as immigrants on various types of visas (e.g., family reunification, employment, and diversity visas). My informants belong to both of these waves: twenty-three individuals left Romania before or immediately after 1989 and acquired the status of political refugees in the United States, while nineteen left after 1989 and came to the United States as immigrants.

Finally, during fieldwork, I found that most of the priests, organization presidents, and core members of organization steering committees and parish councils came to the
United States before the collapse of communism in 1989. In other words, Romanian organizations and churches in the U.S. are still largely led by political refugees more than two decades after the fall of the Romanian regime. My informants reflect this trend. Of the thirteen community leaders I interviewed, ten came to the United States before 1989 and only three (one organization leader and two priests) came after 1989.

Having described my informants, I will now proceed to discussing the process of designing the interview guides and conducting the interviews. I designed two interview guides, one for organization members and one for organization leaders (see Appendices C-F). They are largely similar and differ in a just a few respects to reflect the extra responsibilities organization leaders have compared to organization members. Before designing the interview guides and conducting the interviews, I spent two months in the field observing Romanian immigrants and refugees and participating in their activities. Field immersion enabled me to design appropriate interview guides for semi-structured in-depth interviews lasting between an hour and a half and five hours. As will become evident from the presentation of my interview guides, the clusters of questions do not come in the order of my research objectives. This is because during field immersion I acquired a good sense of the kinds of questions that encourage Romanians to share memories and engage in lively discussion on one hand, and the kinds of questions which raise anxiety among them and impede communication on the other hand. For instance, while my informants were quite happy to tell me about the organizations and churches they belong to and the activities that take place within these institutions and the broader ethnic community, they were rather reluctant to discuss their past experiences of political
repression and their current views of Romanian and American politics. I took these insights into account while designing the interview guides. I began by asking questions my informants looked forward to answering and saved the potentially uncomfortable questions for the end of the interviews. I always made sure to let my interviewees know that they could choose not to answer any question about which they felt uneasy.

Another consideration I took into account while designing the interview guides was the fact that meanings are often implicit in civic practices, interactions among community and organization members, and people’s ways of talking about their community, civic activities, and politics. Since meanings are usually taken for granted and therefore not obvious to people, I refrained from eliciting them directly. I formulated interview questions about concrete aspects of Romanians’ civic and political life and encouraged my informants to elaborate on them, give examples, explain why they found these examples important or memorable, and tell relevant stories in their own words (Charmaz 2006, 34-5). This strategy enabled me to get at my informants’ meanings by understanding the ways in which they organize their experience and acquiring a sense of the language they use to describe it.

I devised clusters of questions corresponding to my research objectives as follows.

Cluster One corresponds to RO 2 (Romanians’ patterns of civic engagement in the United States) and contains questions about the following topics: (1) goals of Romanian Orthodox churches and organizations, and types of activities and events unfolding in Romanian Orthodox churches, organizations, and the broader community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area; (2) Romanians as members/leaders of Romanian Orthodox
churches and organizations, and their responsibilities and contributions to Romanian Orthodox churches, organizations, and the broader community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area; (3) Romanians’ interactions and modes of cooperation in organizing community activities and events; (4) Romanians’ descriptions of their ethnic community in the United States.

Cluster Two corresponds to RO 1 (Romanians’ experiences and understandings of politics in the home and host countries) and contains questions about the following topics: (1) Romanians’ memories of their lives under the Romanian communist regime; (2) Romanians’ reasons for and experiences of escaping/emigrating to the West and settling in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area of the United States; (3) Romanians’ involvement in Romanian politics and their interest in Romanian political events, figures, and groups before and after December 1989; (4) Romanians’ involvement in American politics and their interest in American political events, figures, and groups before and after December 1989, where applicable (as previously mentioned, some Romanians came to the United States prior to December 1989 and others came after December 1989; the set of questions referring to Romanians’ involvement and interest in U.S. politics before December 1989 applies mostly to those who came to the United States before the fall of communism).

There are no questions corresponding to RO 3 (differences between Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants in regard to their experiences and understandings of politics and patterns of civic engagement). This research objective can
be accomplished by comparing the responses given by the two groups of interviewees to the clusters of questions specified above.

Field immersion gave me the chance to meet many community members (including my informants), learn about their struggles over the years, and earn their trust. This was an essential step in the process of interviewing them. As I found out, people who have lived under repressive regimes tend to be suspicious of newcomers (in particular those who approach them with the explicit intention of acquiring information about their daily lives and activities) and of the research process itself. I devote an entire section of this chapter to this challenge (see section 2.5.4. titled “Dealing with suspicion: challenges of ethnographic research among Romanian immigrants and refugees”).

Of my forty-two informants, I interviewed thirty-two once and ten several times. The opportunity to interview some of my informants more than once enabled me to ask follow-up questions and clarifications, and thus acquire a well-rounded sense of their experiences, activities, interactions, and views. As Charmaz indicates, “multiple sequential interviews form a strong basis for creating a nuanced understanding of social process” (2002, 682).

In conducting the interviews, I walked the fine line between focusing the conversation on topics of interest to my research project and allowing my informants to speak freely and in their own words about their civic practices, patterns of interaction with other community and organization members, and understandings of community, civic activities, and politics. I often assumed the role of listener and encouraged my informants to be active speakers. Thus, they were able to take our conversation in unanticipated
directions according to their interests and knowledge (Johnson 2002, 111-2). These strategies yielded rich data, which enabled me to understand how Romanian immigrants and refugees connect their pre-migration experience of political repression to their current civic and political lives in a democratic state.

2.5.3. Data analysis

Between March 2010 and August 2011, I took notes after each session in the field (and sometimes during field sessions). Also, between March 2010 and August 2014, I collected various kinds of written, video, and online documents. In the case of the video documents, I took notes on topics of interest to the dissertation. I described Romanians’ views of Romanian and American politics, community practices and activities, interactions among community and organization members, and understandings of community and civic life. Finally, I transcribed the semi-structured in-depth interviews I conducted between May 2010 and August 2011. Thus, I ended up with a body of textual material for analysis.

I used grounded theory as developed by Charmaz (2006) to analyze the data. I did not collect the data first and started analyzing it later. Rather, I engaged in data analysis from the very beginning of the research process, as suggested by grounded theorists (Charmaz 2006; Glaser 1978, 1992). I followed four main steps in analyzing the data: coding, memo writing, theoretical sampling, and integrating the analysis.

According to Charmaz, coding is “naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.” It represents the “first step in moving beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic interpretations” (2006, 43). I started with initial line-by-line coding of early data
(field notes from ten sessions of participant observation, several organization documents, and transcripts of three interviews with two organization leaders and one journalist). In so doing, I attempted to stay close and open to the data in order to avoid making premature conceptual leaps and imposing preexisting theories on the collected material (Charmaz 2002, 2006; Glaser 1978, 1992). I accomplished this by devising codes that denoted actions rather than general topics (Charmaz 2002, 2006). Here are a few examples of initial codes I devised while reading the interview transcripts: “feeling worried about the small number of organization members,” “complaining about Romanians’ lack of involvement in organization activities,” and “deploring Romanians’ unwillingness to cooperate in organizing community events.” Initial codes were provisional and helped me to identify gaps in the data, which led to further data collection. As I conducted initial coding and kept collecting new data, I used the constant comparison method described by Glaser and Strauss (1967): I compared data with data, data with emerging codes, and codes with codes in order to identify similarities and differences. These strategies enabled me to cluster initial codes into fewer more elaborate codes. For instance, I clustered the three initial codes mentioned above into the code “community fragmentation.” Then, I identified the most significant and frequently recurring codes and moved on to focused or selective coding (Charmaz 2002, 2006; Glaser 1978). According to Charmaz, “[f]ocused codes are more abstract, general, and, simultaneously, analytically incisive than many of the initial codes that they subsume” (2002, 686). I used focused codes to organize larger amounts of data.
The second step of my data analysis was writing memos. As Charmaz puts it, “[m]emo-writing is the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (2006, 72). I started writing memos early in the research process and used them to sift through existing data, begin the process of theory building, identify gaps in the collected data, and gather new data to fill these gaps. In order to build theory, I raised the most important focused codes to conceptual categories, specified their properties, identified conditions under which they occurred, and articulated their relationships to other categories (Charmaz 2002, 2006). For instance, one of my early memos defined the above-mentioned category “community fragmentation” and connected it to the category “intrusive non-democratic politics.” Specifically, community fragmentation was largely explained in terms of the mutual suspicion pervasive among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States as a result of infiltration strategies devised by the repressive communist regime back home. While writing memos, I kept collecting data to fill gaps, coding, and fleshing out my analytic accounts.

The third step of my data analysis was theoretical sampling. According to Charmaz (2002, 2006), theoretical sampling is sampling to develop the researcher’s conceptual categories and their relationships, not to represent a population or increase the statistical generalizability of findings. When I raised the most important focused codes to conceptual categories, gaps became apparent. Many of my categories were incomplete and lacked sufficient evidence. Therefore, I engaged in further data collection until they became saturated, i.e., until all their properties had been specified and no new information could be found (Charmaz 2002, 2006). For example, the category “intrusive
non-democratic politics” was particularly thin and inadequately supported by evidence at the beginning of my research. I conducted further interviews and found that “intrusive non-democratic politics” entailed political interference with Romanians’ private lives both in the home country (e.g., threats, harassment, termination of employment, interrogations, arrests) and in the host country (e.g., infiltration of the Romanian community and Romanian churches and organizations abroad, efforts by representatives of the communist regime to document the lives and activities of Romanian immigrants and refugees for political purposes). In addition, relationships among categories were not well articulated at the beginning of my research. Therefore, I looked for further data to articulate these relationships more clearly. For instance, the relationship between the categories “community fragmentation” and “intrusive non-democratic politics” needed specification. I conducted further participant observation and interviews and found that community fragmentation had largely been caused by the mutual suspicion prevalent among Romanian immigrants and refugees as a result of the strategies of political infiltration devised by the Romanian communist regime. Specifically, Romanian political refugees suspected that representatives of the communist regime aimed to join their community and become members, or even leaders, of Romanian Orthodox churches and organizations in order to inform on them for political purposes. As a result, Romanians often withdrew from existing churches and organizations and created others, thereby contributing to the fragmentation of their community.

The fourth step of my data analysis was the integration of analysis, which means putting the memos together into a coherent narrative. As Charmaz explains, this process
“generally include[s] sorting the memos by the titles of categories, mapping several ways to order the memos, choosing an order that works for the analysis and the prospective audience, and creating clear links between categories” (2002, 690). The integration of analysis resulted in an articulation of the process through which experience of political repression has lowered the likelihood of political integration among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States.

2.5.4. Dealing with suspicion: challenges of ethnographic research among Romanian immigrants and refugees

Ethnographic fieldwork always involves efforts on the part of the researcher to spend time getting to know her research participants and establishing relationships of trust with them. However, doing research among Romanian immigrants and refugees presented extra challenges.

It was not easy to gain access to the Romanian community, even for a Romanian native like myself—or perhaps precisely because I am a Romanian native. First, I noticed that Romanians who experienced communism tend to be suspicious of new acquaintances and inquiries into their daily activities. Many have stories to tell about political intrusions into their private lives and the lives of their friends and family members. Some were fired from their jobs and forced into unemployment for years because they had requested visas to leave the country. Others were watched by the Romanian Secret Police (the infamous Securitate), harassed, and put under house arrest when word got out that they had engaged in promoting human rights. Yet others were arrested, interrogated, and condemned to jail for acts of opposition to the regime. For instance, Romanian immigrant Mirela Roznoveanu notes in an essay titled “Jurnalul între textul scris și hypertextul

In April 1989, I was interrogated by the Securitate and felt quite certain that I was going to be thrown in prison. The events that took place prior to this date had prepared the ground for the Revolution—indeed, they were one of the main triggers of the Revolution. In 1988, I belonged to a group of journalists who later worked for the post-revolutionary newspaper România Liberă [Free Romania] and we tried to publish a clandestine newspaper in communist Romania. We were betrayed and denounced. Subsequently, we were arrested and questioned by the Securitate from November/December 1988 to April 1989. We were fired from our jobs and had our personal lives placed under surveillance. I was banned not just as a journalist, but as a writer too. They used every imaginable form of social and psychological torture against me, from blackmail to threats.

Fear of the regime was most intense back in Romania, but it did not necessarily come to an end when Romanian refugees relocated to the American continent. While communism lasted, many were concerned that anything they said or did in the United States might jeopardize the safety of their loved ones back home. Some refugees realized that their family members who had stayed behind in the home country were reluctant to say much on the phone for fear their conversations might be tapped. Other refugees initiated procedures to bring their relatives over to the United States, only to find out that these persons had been fired from their jobs and were receiving threatening phone calls from anonymous interlocutors. Given such experiences with the repressive Romanian regime, it is no wonder that many Romanians in the U.S. tend to be wary of strangers and avoid disclosing too much information about their personal lives.
Of course, more than two decades have passed since the 1989 collapse of communism and the suspicion and fear experienced by Romanian immigrants and refugees have gradually diminished over time. Nonetheless, many are still reluctant to open up and converse freely about their past. Indeed, during fieldwork, I realized that people were often hesitant to make my acquaintance, particularly when I shared my interest in their ethnic community and civic and political life. Over time, I found out that many had questioned my trustworthiness as a researcher and some had even wondered whether I was “working” for shady Romanian politicians or interest groups. The following stories are revealing in this sense. Several research participants told me that they had run checks on my background, education history, credentials, and the university I was studying at before agreeing to talk to me. One informant went to even greater lengths to make sure I was an honest person. He agreed to meet me at a Romanian restaurant in Sunnyside, Queens for an interview. Once we had taken our seats at a table, he said that he had requested information about me from one of his closest friends, a reputed Romanian journalist whom I had interviewed a few days earlier. The journalist reassured him that my goals were purely academic, but my informant needed further proof. He deliberately came to our meeting twenty minutes early and remained in his car outside the entrance to the restaurant, because he wanted to see me arrive without being noticed in turn. He explained that he was trying to find out whether I would come alone or accompanied by another person who might be hiding in the shadows and attempting to extract information from him for dubious purposes. When he saw me arrive alone, he laid his fears aside and concluded that I was reliable and had told him the truth about my intentions. Later on,
this informant proved instrumental in securing further interviews for my research project. He is an elderly, well-known, and respected figure in the Romanian community. The fact that he agreed to give me an interview and spoke well of me at various ethnocultural events helped me gain access to other Romanians.

Second, not only did my informants question my trustworthiness as a researcher, they were also wary of the process of data collection involved in academic research. For example, many were reluctant to sign the interview consent forms. Paradoxically, these persons experienced fear and suspicion when given the interview consent forms in spite of my repeated explanations that the purpose of the forms was to inform them about my research objectives and to protect their identity by ensuring the anonymity of their responses. The fact that the interview consent forms referred to the collection of personal information, including demographic data and details about Romanians’ civic and political views, interactions, and activities within Romanian churches, organizations, and the broader ethnic community resonated negatively with my informants’ past experience of political repression. Many associated this procedure with the dishonest and coercive means through which agents of the Romanian communist regime used to extract information about citizens’ private lives for the purpose of political control. One of the organization leaders I interviewed encountered a similar challenge. He recounted that at the beginning of his term as organization president, he had decided to run an intense advertising campaign among Romanian immigrants and refugees in order to spread the word about his organization and urge people to become members. For this purpose, he went to the Consulate General of Romania in New York to obtain available contact data
for members of the Romanian community. However, he was aware of the fact that his strategy of collecting names and private addresses and phone numbers would be regarded as controversial by the very people he was trying to attract. As a result, he made efforts to explain that the contact data he had obtained from the Consulate was not “that kind of information,” referring to information collected by representatives of the Romanian communist regime about people’s private lives.

The researcher who wishes to immerse herself in the ethnic community and organizations created by Romanian immigrants and refugees needs to spend time with them in an effort to gain their trust and let them know that she is acting in good faith, with no intention to misuse information. She must make it clear to the people with whom she works that she only intends to write about those aspects of their lives that they themselves choose to discuss and give her explicit permission to use for academic purposes only.

2.5.5. Reflections on my role as a researcher

My Romanian background had both advantages and disadvantages during the research process. On one hand, the fact that I shared my research participants’ ethnocultural, historical, and political background enabled me to understand their views, stories, and practices. I grasped with ease their references to secular and religious celebrations, art and culture, life under communism and post-communism, and political figures and parties in the home country, and I was also familiar with their religious practices. Thus, I was able to converse with them for long periods of time, ask relevant questions, and seek clarifications, as well as integrate into their churches quickly and smoothly. I also
understood the fear, anxiety, and reluctance they felt when asked to talk about their personal and community life and their political experiences, and I found ways to allay their worries that resonated with them.

However, my Romanian background also raised several obstacles in the course of my research. First, most of my research participants assumed that I shared their experiences and views of civic life and politics, and often failed to elaborate on important insights. For instance, when describing their ethnic community or home country politics, many Romanian immigrants and refugees made remarks such as the following: “You know what we Romanians are like,” “I don’t need to tell you, you know how our fellow Romanians behave toward their fellow ethnics,” or “Romanian politics must be all too familiar to you, you don’t need me to tell you about it.” Thus, the very fact that I am Romanian often prevented my research participants from unpacking their thoughts. In such cases, I told them explicitly that I needed to hear their stories in their own words and asked for concrete examples. This strategy encouraged them to give details and flesh out their accounts. Second, my Romanian background triggered numerous discussions about Romanian politics, but at the same time took the focus away from American politics. Since I am Romanian, my research participants felt more eager to talk about Romanian politics than about American politics. I made efforts to remedy this bias by asking explicit and concrete questions about American politics, but even then answers were often brief and conversations soon reverted to Romanian politics. Third, as indicated in Section 2.5.4, my Romanian background and my studies in Political Science raised suspicions among my research participants. Many have had traumatic experiences of
communist and post-communist Romanian politics and have developed negative understandings of civic and political life. Therefore, they were reluctant to talk about themselves, their community, and their political views during fieldwork and interviews. Even simple attempts on my part to gather personal information such as demographic data reminded them of dubious practices used by communist officials for the purpose of political control. However, by spending time with my research participants and reassuring them that my intentions were purely academic, I eventually succeeded in winning their trust and making them feel comfortable opening up and talking to me.

2.6. Conclusion

Chapter Two has presented the dissertation’s research objectives and the methods it uses to accomplish them. Section 2.2 outlined the main and subsidiary research objectives. Section 2.3 explained the choice of Romanian immigrants and refugees in terms of their country of origin, the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States, and their demographic characteristics. Section 2.4 explained the choice of research location and identification of community boundaries. Section 2.5 argued for the use of ethnography and discussed the methods of data collection (participant observation, document collection, and semi-structured in-depth interviews) and data analysis (grounded theory). The section closed with a reflection on the challenges of ethnographic research among Romanian immigrants and refugees. Chapter Three will elaborate on Romanian immigrants and refugees’ country of origin, waves of immigration to the United States, and demographic characteristics.
Chapter Three

Background Information about Romanian Immigrants and Refugees in the United States: Country of Origin, Waves of Immigration, and Demographic Characteristics

3.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter Three offers background information on Romanian immigrants and refugees. It discusses in detail the three reasons identified in Chapter Two that this group of immigrants and refugees is an appropriate choice for the dissertation’s research project. Section 3.2 describes their country of origin. Section 3.3 presents the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States. Section 3.4 discusses the demographic characteristics of Romanian immigrants and refugees.

3.2. Communist and Post-Communist Romania as Country of Origin: Non-Democratic Governments and Weak Civil Society

Since this dissertation explores the civic and political lives of immigrants and refugees subjected to political repression prior to resettlement, I selected Romania as a country of origin. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), this country experienced the most repressive types of non-democratic political regimes (totalitarianism and totalitarianism-cum-sultanism) and an almost non-existent civil society for more than four decades (1945-1989). When communism collapsed in 1989, Romania began a long and rocky journey to democracy: it inherited governments with strong non-democratic tendencies and a persistently weak civil society.

In this section, I present Romanian communism and post-communism focusing on government and civil society. This is important background information to Romanian
immigrants and refugees’ civic and political lives in the United States. It gives the reader a sense of the non-democratic forms of government to which these people were subjected and of the damages incurred by Romanian civil society both before and after 1989. This is the civic and political legacy Romanians bring to bear on their lives in the host society. The dissertation seeks to understand how this legacy has led to their withdrawal from the American political system.

Linz and Stepan (1996) identify four non-democratic regime types (authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian, and sultanistic), of which the last two are the most repressive. Let me present the features of totalitarian and sultanistic regimes as discussed by Linz and Stepan.¹

First, the authors consider the criteria of leadership and ideology, which pertain to oppressive rulership. Authoritarian and post-totalitarian leaders rule within ill-defined but predictable norms, whereas totalitarian and sultanistic leaders rule unhindered by norms and are therefore highly unpredictable for ordinary citizens and elites alike. While totalitarian leaders are at least partly constrained by an elaborate state ideology which provides legitimacy to the regime, sultans exert power without taking into account any ideology, rational-legal norms, or balance of power. They display a degree of personalism and arbitrariness that is unknown in totalitarian regimes. According to Linz and Stepan, the “essence of sultanism is unrestrained personal rulership” (54) with dynastic tendencies; indeed, the “sultanistic polity becomes the personal domain of the sultan” (52).

¹ The following discussion of non-democratic regime types relies on Chapter 3 “Modern Nondemocratic Regimes” of Linz and Stepan (1996).
The third and fourth criteria are mobilization and pluralism, which refer to society. Authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes display low and weakened levels of mobilization respectively. Totalitarian regimes are characterized by extensive mobilization into a dense network of regime-created organizations while private activities are denounced. Sultanistic regimes display low and erratic mobilization of the general population, but they mobilize para-state groups to terrorize and crush the sultan’s opponents. As to pluralism, authoritarian regimes have limited political pluralism but quite extensive social and economic pluralism; many forms of pluralism date back to the pre-authoritarian period. Post-totalitarian regimes have no political pluralism and limited but growing social and economic pluralism; most forms of pluralism arise in response to totalitarianism and aim to undermine it. By contrast, totalitarian regimes display no political, social, or economic pluralism; almost all forms of pre-totalitarian pluralism have been crushed and the official party monopolizes power. In sultanistic regimes, there may be social and economic pluralism, but political pluralism is impossible because the sultan controls the polity as he would his personal property. However, all forms of pluralism are at risk in sultanistic regimes, where the private/public distinction collapses and “all individuals, groups, and institutions are permanently subject to the unpredictable and despotic intervention of the sultan” (52-3).

In sum, totalitarian and sultanistic regimes are the most repressive: leaders exert despotic power and rule without restraint whether they act in virtue of a legitimating ideology (totalitarianism) or not (sultanism); extensive efforts are made to control society by mobilizing the general population into a vast range of regime-created organizations.
(totalitarianism) or by using para-state groups to eradicate opposition through violent means (sultanism); and pluralism is almost non-existent (totalitarianism) or highly vulnerable to despotic interference (sultanism).

According to Linz and Stepan, the vast majority of Eastern European communist states started out as Stalinist totalitarian regimes, but between the second half of the 1950s and the late 1980s they underwent a gradual process of detotalitarianization. Once communism collapsed, this post-totalitarian evolution facilitated their transition to democracy to a greater or a lesser extent, depending on the speed and degree of detotalitarianization in each country. Communist Romania, on the other hand, never moved beyond totalitarianism. In fact, Linz and Stepan argue that the period of Stalinist totalitarianism of the 1950s and early 1960s gave way to the “most difficult and least understood regime configuration—one that combines sultanistic and totalitarian tendencies” (343). In the same vein, Tismăneanu suggests that apart from Albania no other Eastern European country was subjected to “such an uninterrupted exercise of Stalinist repression” (1997, 413).

Between 1945 and 1989, communist Romania was governed by two main rulers: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1948-1965) and Nicolae Ceauşescu (1965-1989). Tismăneanu notes that they were “very different in terms of personality and psychological make-up,” but at the same time “shared both a deep commitment to the Stalinist cult of discipline and a striking knack for eliminating any potential adversaries or sources of heresy” (2003, 13).
Based on Linz and Stepan’s criteria of leadership and ideology, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was a ruthless and manipulating totalitarian leader whose commitment to Stalinism and unpredictable behavior affected ordinary citizens and party elites alike.\(^1\) He was ready to do anything to prove his loyalty to Stalin and protect himself from the Soviet dictator’s arbitrariness. To earn Stalin’s appreciation and trust, Dej became directly involved in the exertion of terror. Not only did interwar democratic politicians, intellectuals, members of the church, and peasants suffer at his hands, but high-rank communists were often abusively arrested, imprisoned, and executed as well. When Stalin died in 1953, Khrushchev came to power and started exposing the mass arrests, deportations, and executions perpetrated in the Soviet Union under the Stalinist regime. Confronted with this reformist trend, Dej felt insecure because he had been a loyal Stalinist. Consequently, he not only refused to de-Stalinize Romania, but tightened his grip on power and turned the Romanian Communist Party into “one of the most hardline of the communist camp” (Deletant 1999a, 255). During the 1956 anti-Soviet Hungarian revolution, the Dej government actively supported the Soviet Union’s deployment of military force to crush the uprising. Using the political capital he gained at the time, Dej managed to convince Khrushchev to withdraw the Soviet troops stationed in Romania. Left in charge of his country and eager to prove to the Soviet Union that the Romanian communist regime would not be weakened by the Soviet military withdrawal, Dej increased the exertion of domestic terror. This led to a new wave of arrests which resulted in thousands of people, including well-known writers, scholars, and students, being

\(^1\) The following discussion of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime relies on Deletant (1995, 1-67) and Deletant (1999). However, other relevant references have been added throughout.
thrown in prison or sent to forced labor camps in the Danube Delta. Political purges were also conducted among government employees. Up to the last year of Dej’s rule, “terror embraced the whole of Romanian society in a search for actual or potential opponents of totalitarian conformity and imparted to many throughout the population the sense that they were being hunted” (Deletant 1999a, x).

As far as mobilization is concerned, the totalitarian Dej government made every effort to regiment the population. It drew on Leninist and Stalinist ideology to dismantle existing civil society institutions and replace them with a dense network of regime-controlled mass organizations (see, for instance, Fischer-Galati 1957). According to the Final Report compiled by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (CPADCR), hundreds of political, cultural, religious, and professional associations were forced to close doors in order to make room for “new channels of social organization and mobilization, which were ideologically defined and aimed at achieving social integration into the socialist nation as the communist authorities imagined it” (2006, 136). The role of these new organizations was to cement the power of the Communist Party in society: they were expected to organize the population, socialize the masses into communist ideology, form the new Party elite, and exert social control. Briefly put, “while the regime used these mass organizations to simulate democratic mechanisms, they were in fact just another instrument of power at the disposal of the communist dictatorship” (138).

As to pluralism, the Dej regime made every effort to annihilate opposition in order to establish itself as the only political authority in the country. As mentioned above, the
government conducted tens of thousands of arrests with the aid of the Romanian Secret Police (the *Securitate*). Targeted groups included members of democratic political parties (the National Peasant Party and the National Liberal Party), students, teachers, and university professors, public intellectuals, Orthodox and Catholic priests and monks, as well as peasants who opposed forced collectivization. Even members of the higher Party ranks were thrown in jail if they came to be seen as “enemies of the state.” Many were subjected to political trials, incarcerated for decades or their entire lives, sent to forced labor camps, tortured, and executed. The atmosphere was suffocating and opposition to the regime seemed close to impossible. According to CPADCR, “until the early 1960s, the terror exerted against those who opposed the regime or were seen as potential dissidents, combined with a loss of faith in a Western intervention, annihilated almost completely the ability of society to act against the regime” (2006, 360). As Deletant puts it,

> Police coercion and intrusion became a part of everyday life and a feature of existence which generated a pervasive fear, a state of mind which revolutionized not just society’s structures but also personal behavior. Animated conversation gave way to the furtive whisper or parable, suggestion replaced open discussion and the simplest of messages was wrapped in a code. (1995, 15)

When Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power in 1965, the regime of terror seemed to give way to liberalization.\(^1\) In the beginning, Ceaușescu denounced former *Securitate* abuses and adopted a defiant attitude toward the Soviet Union, thereby giving the impression that a period of relaxation would follow (Deletant 1995, 68-93; Deletant 1999b, 112). However, this was not the case. Ceaușescu used anti-Soviet and nationalist sentiments to

---

\(^1\) The following discussion of Ceaușescu’s rule relies on Linz and Stepan (1996, 347-56). However, other relevant references have been added throughout.
gather national and international support. This move enabled him to rise from among the other Party leaders and establish his authority as supreme ruler of Romania. Ceauşescu’s greed for power was enhanced by his visit to North Korea in the early 1970s. He was impressed by Kim Il Sung’s personalistic regime in Pyongyang and decided to create a version of it in Romania (Almond 1992, 70). As a result, all signs of political liberalization vanished and the country was subjected to a process of re-Stalinization, but this time with a “sultanistic” twist, to use Linz and Stepan’s Weberian notion. Over time, Ceauşescu monopolized power and his rule became increasingly erratic and indifferent to any ideology or legal norms. He created a personality cult of massive proportions and distributed his own relatives in key government positions. Everyone, from intellectuals, to workers and peasants, to school children had to sing praises to the “most beloved son of the nation” (Gabanyi 2000, 131). According to Tismăneanu, “[b]y the mid-1980s, the cult had developed unprecedented, unbelievable forms, far outdoing its relatively benign expressions in the early 1970s” (2003, 213). As an example, the twentieth anniversary of Ceauşescu’s election as Secretary General of the Communist Party “unleashed an avalanche of dithyrambic hymns and odes bound to titillate the Supreme Leader’s insatiable appetite for glory” (Tismăneanu 2003, 213; for extensive discussions of Ceauşescu’s personality cult, see also Fischer 1986; Gabanyi 2000; Tismăneanu 2003, 187-232).

According to Linz and Stepan’s mobilization criterion, the Ceauşescu regime was clearly totalitarian. As CPADCR demonstrates, the Romanian Communist Party grew so large that in the 1980s it comprised 3,800,000 members (2006, 156). In terms of
percentage of the population, it surpassed all the other Eastern European parties and was
twice the size of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Besides being subjected to
Party mobilization, the vast majority of Romanians (including children and youth) were
compelled to enroll and participate in regime-controlled organizations. These included
communist youth organizations, workers’ trade unions, state-owned agricultural
cooperatives, science associations, artists’ and writers’ unions, community associations,
and many more. All these organizations were heavily politicized and their aim was to
indoctrinate the population, keep it under surveillance, and crowd out all forms of
independent activity. As one Romanian social scientist interviewed by Linz and Stepan
put it, “in no other East European country were so many organizations politicized. Even
small organizations with no intrinsic political character, such as an ‘organization of
people concerned with bees,’ were organized by the party-state. The system interfered
more deeply in aspects of your life than in any other East European country” (1996, 355).
In the early 1970s, the regime went even further in its efforts to control society: it created
the Socialist Unity Front (later called the Socialist Unity and Democracy Front), an
umbrella organization which brought large numbers of associations under Ceauşescu’s
direct supervision.

As far as pluralism is concerned, Ceauşescu’s regime was totalitarian-sultanistic. In
contrast to several other Eastern European states, which became more liberal after 1960,
Romania continued to maintain a tight control over its population (CPADCR 2006, 156).
As previously mentioned, Ceauşescu exerted an extremely personalized and despotic type
of power, which he managed to sustain by placing his own relatives in key government
positions, bestowing rewards upon regime loyalists, and using the Securitate to threaten and wield violence against dissenters. Under Ceauşescu, the role of the Communist Party was “superseded by the absolute power of the Secretary General and his family” and independent initiative among Party apparatchiks was “reduced to a minimum” (Tismăneanu 1989, 192-3). Ceauşescu’s wife Elena was the second most powerful person in the state. She was elected to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party in 1972 and promoted to the Party’s Executive Committee only a year later. In 1980, Elena was appointed First Deputy Prime Minister. Despite her poor academic performance, she became a member of the Romanian Academy, Director General of the Central Institute for Chemical Research, and Vice-President of the National Council of Science and Technology (Deletant 1995, 327; Kligman 1998, 129-31; Tismăneanu 2003, 204-6). Ceauşescu’s brothers also held important positions in the Ministry of Defense, the Securitate, and other committees and institutions (Tismăneanu 1989, 192-3; 2003, 223).

While the Ceauşescu family monopolized power, intellectuals and technocrats were offered symbolic and material advantages in return for compliance with the regime (Deletant 1995, 166-293; Verdery 1991). Some intellectuals supported the regime out of genuine conviction, but most vied for benefits. The extremely few individuals who dared to voice discontent were brutally suppressed by the Securitate. They were closely watched and harassed, fired from their jobs, beaten, arrested, sent to prison, psychiatric hospitals, or forced labor camps, and even executed (CPADCR 2006, 360-76; Deletant 1995, 68-102, 235-93, 322-76; Firan 2000; IICC 2009; Mareş 2006; Petrescu 2004, 149).

As a result, Romanian dissidents were lonely figures and their opposition to the regime
consisted in sporadic acts of disobedience, which failed to mobilize larger groups (CPADCR 2006, 360-76; Deletant 1995, 235-93; Tismăneanu 2003, 211-5). According to Tismăneanu, public dissent was “reduced to quixotic stances, all the more heroic since those who voiced unorthodox views could not count on solidarity or support from colleagues” (2003, 211). The Orthodox Church was allowed to exist as an emblem of Romanian nationalism, but at the same time it was forced into obedience through a combination of brutal persecution of dissenting priests and appointment of patriarchs who were willing to turn a blind eye to the injustices perpetrated against their church (Gillett 1997; Stan and Turcescu 2005, 2007). In addition, parishes were heavily infiltrated by Securitate agents whose mission was to inform on the content of the sermons and the private lives of both priests and parishioners (CPADCR 2006; Stan and Turcescu 2005, 2007). Workers too were largely compliant with the regime. The few instances of labor unrest were quickly suppressed by the Securitate and leaders were made to disappear, arrested, or murdered. As a result of this politics of control, six months after the collapse of communism, Romania had the lowest number of independent organizations in a group of nine Eastern European states (see Figure 1).

Alongside Albania, Romania was subjected to the most repressive form of Eastern European communism, which caused a great deal of damage to civil society. Half a century of totalitarian and sultanistic rule combined with a high degree of societal control left a difficult legacy for the country’s post-communist period.1 Romania was the

---

1 The following discussion of Romania’s post-communist period relies on Linz and Stepan (1996, 356-65) and Levitsky and Way (2010, 12-9). However, other relevant references have been added throughout.
only Eastern European state to experience a violent overthrow of communism due to the absence of favorable conditions for a peaceful transition to democracy. Since Party soft-liners had been marginalized by the Ceauşescu family, there was little hope for a negotiated transition from within the Communist Party. In addition, well-organized democratic groups were virtually non-existent in communist Romania, hence the lack of a viable civil society which could have pressured the regime to relinquish control in a non-violent way. Consequently, Romanian communism fell as a result of a bloody uprising and Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu were summarily executed after a rushed and questionable trial that flaunted human rights, the rule of law, and all principles of justice (Almond 1992, 224-36; Stan 2009, 142-3; 2013, 41-6; Tismăneanu 1997, 418).

Post-communist Romania inherited a succession of governments with strong non-democratic tendencies (IICC 2007) and a persistently weak civil society. The National
Salvation Front (FSN), Romania’s first governing body formed immediately after the revolution was a heterogeneous group of self-proclaimed anti-communists. However, FSN soon came to be dominated by ex-communist apparatchiks who were more interested in preserving their privileged positions than in laying the groundwork for a genuine transition to democracy (Gallagher 2005, 71-5; Groseșcu 2006; Tismăneanu 1997, 418). Ion Țăriceanu, a former member of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, who had been marginalized by Ceaușescu in the 1970s, became the leader of FSN. Iliescu manipulated the trial and execution of the Ceaușescu couple to his advantage: due to the highly personalized nature of the sultanistic regime, the public’s hatred was entirely directed at the dictator and his wife; hence, by playing a role in their elimination, Iliescu appeared as a hero of the revolution despite the fact that he had belonged to the higher ranks of the Communist Party prior to 1989. In the first presidential elections of 1990, Iliescu had a clear advantage over the newly constituted and still feeble opposition and won with 85 percent of the vote. He also enabled the FSN to win a majority of seats in parliament with 66 percent of the vote. In 1992, Iliescu won the presidential elections again with 61 percent of the vote, while his party—the former FSN, renamed the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN)—won the largest number of seats in parliament and governed the country until 1996. It was as late as 1996 that Romania experienced genuine alternation of political power for the first time after the 1989 collapse of communism (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 54-7; Tismăneanu and Kligman 2001). Iliescu lost the presidential elections in favor of opposition leader Emil Constantinescu, while Iliescu’s party—the former FDSN, renamed yet again the Party of
Romanian Social Democracy (PDSR)—lost the parliamentary elections in favor of the opposition coalition called the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR). However, Iliescu and PDSR returned to power in 2000. Tismăneanu states that “the first postcommunist decade in Romania can be summed up as the move from Iliescu to Iliescu, with a four-year Constantinescu interlude” (2003, 237).

This course of events prompted scholars of post-communism to discuss Romanian exceptionalism (Tismăneanu 2003, 246). For instance, Linz and Stepan see the Romanian post-communist regime as different from the post-communist regimes of all other Eastern European countries (including the three Baltic states) because by 1996 “no leaders [had] gained power who did not have a career in the Communist Party apparatus (not just membership or association with the party)” (1996, 365). In their view, Romania only experienced a partial *ruptura* with communism. Similarly, Levitsky and Way (2010) categorize the first decade and a half of Romanian post-communism (1990-2004), with the exception of the four-year democratic period between 1996 and 2000, as competitive authoritarianism. According to the authors, competitive authoritarian regimes have real but often unfair elections: opposition candidates and parties are allowed to compete, but incumbent control over state resources, the media, and the legislative and judiciary branches of government, along with other irregularities, create an uneven playing field and make it almost impossible for the opposition to win. Also, in competitive authoritarian regimes, civil liberties are formally protected but often violated in practice. Indeed, Iliescu and his party controlled the state media and exerted significant pressure on the newly formed private media as well. This made it difficult for the opposition to
convey its own messages to the public (Dryzek, Holmes, and Chirițoiu 2002, 191; Sellin 2004, 120-2). In addition, Iliescu and his party made every effort to subordinate the legislative and judiciary branches of government to executive and partisan power (Sellin 2004, 120-2). As to civil rights, the Iliescu regime engaged in highly repressive behavior. Among the worst episodes was a series of organized attacks on members of the opposition. The most violent occurred in June 1990, when the government brought thousands of miners from the Jiu Valley to the country’s capital to end by violence a month-long protest by the opposition. Chaos broke out in Bucharest leaving several people dead and hundreds wounded. Protesters and random civilians were beaten up in the streets, while opposition party headquarters and the offices of several civic groups were ransacked over a period of two days (Gallagher 2005, 95-7; Gledhill and King 2011, 318-9). Iliescu thanked the miners for their “civic awareness” and for rescuing democracy from extremist “right-wing forces” (Gallagher 2005, 96).

The Iliescu regime displayed non-democratic tendencies, but was finally defeated in 2004 when Traian Băsescu, leader of the Democratic Party, won the presidential elections against Adrian Năstase, candidate of the Social Democratic Party (PSD)—former PDSR— and widely viewed as Iliescu’s successor. Băsescu stayed in power for ten years (2004-2014) and was largely perceived as a former communist who nonetheless put Romania on its path to democracy. Under communism, Băsescu had been a member of the Communist Party and a ship captain who travelled abroad frequently during the 1980s. In 1987 he represented the Romanian Fluvial Navigation Company (NAVROM) in Anvers, Belgium. Given the important positions he held before 1989, Băsescu became
the target of numerous political accusations of collaboration with the *Securitate*. In a statement published on April 8, 1992 in the Romanian newspaper *Telegraf*, Băsescu acknowledged that prior to 1989 he had indeed provided information reports to the *Securitate* because this was required by his job as a ship captain. Since his *Securitate* file has not been found, it is impossible to tell how closely Băsescu collaborated with the political police. Nonetheless, Romania became democratic under his rule. Băsescu publicly denounced the communist regime. In addition, he lessened political pressure on the media and initiated a reform of the judiciary to ensure its independence from partisan interests. Băsescu also oversaw Romania’s accession to the European Union. Despite this progress, recent events in Romania have once again raised the spectrum of an authoritarian relapse. In July 2012, Prime Minister Victor Ponta and his center-left Social Liberal Union (USL) moved to impeach President Băsescu. To achieve their goals, Ponta and the USL mounted an attack on the rule of law and several key Romanian institutions, including the Constitutional Court. This course of events prompted scholars to discuss an attempted *coup d’état* and drew harsh critique from civic organizations, the European Union, and the United States (Tismăneanu 2013).

The succession of Romanian governments with nondemocratic tendencies has been associated with a persistently weak, though growing civil society. This problem affects much of the former Soviet bloc albeit to different degrees. Pop-Eleches notes that the most significant and enduring legacy of communism can be observed at the level of the average citizen. He identifies a public virtues deficit that “has to do with the underdeveloped ‘art of association’ in ex-communist countries” (2006, 54). Indeed, while
the number and variety of civic organizations has increased in post-communist Eastern Europe (Ekiert and Foa 2011, 24-7; Ekiert and Kubik 1999, 101-7; 2014), a large body of literature documents low levels of civic engagement in the region (Bădescu, Sum, and Uslaner 2004; Howard 2003a, 2003b, 2011; Pop-Eleches 2006; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013; Valkov 2009; Wallace, Pichler, and Haerpfer 2012). Howard (2003a) uses data generated by the 1990-1991 and 1995-1997 World Values Survey to undertake a comparative analysis of thirty-one post-communist, post-authoritarian, and democratic states. The results show that post-communist states have much lower levels of civic engagement measured as citizen membership in voluntary organizations than post-authoritarian and democratic states. This pattern remains valid for the 1999-2008 time period, as indicated by subsequent waves of the World Values Survey (Howard 2011; Valkov 2009; Wallace, Pichler, and Haerpfer 2012). Howard (2003a, 2003b, 2011) explains post-communist citizens’ unwillingness to join voluntary organizations by pointing to their experience of forced membership in party-controlled organizations, their retreat from public life into the world of private family relations, and their disappointment with post-communist political and economic development.

However, recent studies (Ekiert and Foa 2011; Ekiert and Kubik 2014) challenge the scholarly agreement about the weakness of civil society in the post-communist world. These studies show that there is great variety in civil society outcomes across the region, particularly if one considers the fact that civil society is not reducible to citizen

---

1 Howard (2003a) uses the regime typology proposed by Linz and Stepan (1996) to categorize the regimes in his study. Howard’s post-communist states are the states that emerged from Soviet-style totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism as defined by Linz and Stepan. Howard’s post-authoritarian states are the regimes that emerged from authoritarianism as defined by Linz and Stepan.
membership in voluntary organizations. Other indicators are rates of growth and activity of civic organizations, levels of citizen donations and volunteering, democratic values and goals of civic actors, and degree of influence on public policy. Further comparative research needs to determine how post-communist countries fare on these dimensions.

While post-communist countries display a wide variety of civil societies (some healthier than others), post-communist Romania has consistently had one of the weakest civil societies in Eastern Europe. According to recent scholarly studies and reports on Romanian civil society (Bădescu, Sum, and Uslaner 2004; FDSC 2005, 2010), the country still has low levels of citizen membership in civic organizations. For instance, Stan (2003) indicates that between 85 and 93 percent of Romanians do not belong to any association, depending on the region they live in. According to this study, since December 1989, “few Romanians have come together in voluntary associations, and even fewer have remained active members sharing responsibilities within grassroots organizations” (258). By 2010, most Romanian non-governmental (NGOs) had failed to develop strategies to attract new members and counted only on the persons who had founded them. As a result, 50 percent of NGOs had ten members or less (FDSC 2010).

But how about other indicators of a well-functioning civil society? Existing data suggest that Romania does not fare much better on these measures either. Granted, the number and diversity of civic organizations has grown since 1989. Between 1996 and 2007, the number of associations and foundations increased from 11,579 to 62,101, the number of professional organizations increased from 535 to 3785, and the number of religious organizations increased from 6591 to 18,886 (FDSC 2010). Moreover,
Romanian civic organizations engage in a variety of activities related to education, religion, healthcare, employment, professional development, social services, gender issues, human rights, and sports and recreation, among others (FDSC 2005, 2010).

But while these are positive trends, caution must be exercised in inferring the emergence of a healthy burgeoning civil society from numbers and diversity of organizations alone. For one thing, many organizations are inactive (Stan 2003). Recent reports state that less than 40 percent of all Romanian NGOs have been active between 2000 and 2010 (Constantinescu 2012) and less than a quarter undertake regular programs (Pralong 2009). Second, levels of citizen donations and volunteering remain discouragingly low (Bădescu, Sum, and Uslaner 2004; Bădescu et al. 2007; FDSC 2010; Voicu and Voicu 2003, 2009). Although consistent data on these aspects of civic engagement are not available, a 2010 survey indicates that between 80 and 87 percent of the interviewees had not made any donation to their communities and 94 percent had not volunteered with any NGOs during the previous twelve months (FDSC 2010). In fact, Pralong (2004) finds that less than 16 percent of NGOs work with volunteers. Third, the values and goals of civic actors are often questionable. Pralong (2004) demonstrates that the majority of Romanian NGOs have formed in response to the availability of foreign aid, not through grassroots initiatives of citizen groups willing to work together for common goals. Many occupy a profitable market niche and design their agendas in response to the concerns of Western donors rather than according to local needs. While this trend has had a positive effect in raising awareness of previously unaddressed issues in Romanian society (e.g., gender and ethnic discrimination), it is also an indication of
the feebleness of the country’s associational life. As late as 2010, over a third of Romanian NGOs relied on international funding from the European Union as well as other foreign foundations and governmental institutions. By comparison, only 18.5 percent of NGOs reported domestic sources of income—7.5 percent from individual donations and 11 percent from Romanian companies and private foundations (FDSC 2010). What is more, there are indications that many entrepreneurs have created NGOs in order to take advantage of tax loopholes and conduct black market businesses behind the façade of community-oriented activities. Although reliable estimates of fraudulent NGOs are not available, the fact that in certain areas there are as many as twenty organizations registered in the name of a single person (Pralong 2009) raises question marks about the quality of Romanian civil society. Fourth, since the 1989 fall of communism, Romanian civil society has had a growing but insufficient influence on public policy. From 1990 to 1996, the relationship between the Romanian government and NGOs was tense and oppositional (FDSC 2010). Indeed, the first meeting of the Romanian Prime Minister with NGO representatives took place as late as 1997 (Lisetchi and Micescu 2013). The role of NGOs in public policy became increasingly important after Romania’s first democratic government came to power in 1996 and even more so as a result of foreign pressures during the country’s preparations for accession to the European Union (2000-2007). But despite these improvements, the ability of Romanian NGOs to influence public policy stagnated and even declined after 2008 (FDSC 2010). Currently, there are few institutional mechanisms within the Romanian government responsible for
communication with NGOs (Lisetchi and Micăs 2013). Romanian post-communist civil society has been developing but remains weak in many respects.

3.3. Two Recent Waves of Romanian Immigration to the United States: Political Refugees (1945-1989/1990) and Post-Communist Immigrants (1990-present)

Having discussed Romanian immigrants and refugees’ civic and political legacy, let me present the waves of Romanian immigration to the United States. Romanian immigrants and refugees arrived in three main waves, of which the last two are of interest to this study: the political refugees of the communist period (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism (1990-present).

As mentioned in Chapter Two, studying these two waves of immigration has two advantages. First, more than twenty years have passed since communism fell in Romania. This time lapse enables Romanian political refugees to talk more freely about their experience under communist repression, their political views, and their community interactions and activities in the United States. Second, studying the two waves of immigration provides researchers with the opportunity to observe if anything has changed from one wave to the next. Specifically, I am interested in finding out whether Romanian political refugees who fled communism and Romanian immigrants who were raised under communism but also lived through the collapse of the regime and a period of democratic transition at home tend to develop different understandings of politics and different patterns of civic engagement within their ethnic community and organizations in the United States.
In this section, I present the waves of Romanian immigration to the United States focusing mostly on the two most recent ones.

The first wave of Romanian immigrants crossed the Atlantic along with thousands of other Eastern Europeans between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. As Figure 2 indicates, by 1930, more than 150,000 Romanian immigrants had made it to the United States.

![Figure 2. Romanian Immigration to the United States (1880-2009)](source: USDHS (2012))

They were mostly peasants and unskilled laborers who left their homes in Transylvania, Bukovina, and Banat because of economic hardship and the policies of forced ethnic assimilation imposed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Early Romanians worked in the iron and steel industries, coal mining, automobile manufacturing, and
meatpacking or became small entrepreneurs (Anagnostosache 1944; Robila 2010). These immigrants created many community organizations such as Romanian Orthodox churches, boarding houses, and mutual benefit societies (Bobango 1980; Costoiu 2009; Gozdziak 1996). They formed ethnic enclaves in cities on the East Coast and in the Midwest or lived in diverse neighborhoods together with Poles, Russians, and Slovaks (Gozdziak 1996). The descendants of early Romanian immigrants were educated in American public schools, moved into the middle class, and retained certain elements of “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans 1999) largely associated with religion and leisure-time activities (Gozdziak 1996).

Romanian political refugees arrived in the United States between 1945 and 1989/1990, when limited numbers of Eastern Europeans managed to flee their home countries in order to escape political repression, religious persecution, and the low living standards brought about by communism.

Many were intellectuals, professionals, religious figures, and students who had endured harassment at the hands of the regime and often risked their freedom and even their lives to cross over to the West (Costoiu 2009; Gozdziak 1996; Ispa-Landa 2007; Robila 2010).

The majority of Romanian political refugees were admitted to the United States as permanent residents under several refugee acts passed after the Second World War: the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, which enabled the Attorney General to grant “parole” status to certain individuals and groups entering the United States in excess of immigration quotas (mostly persons who
had fled the communist regimes of Eastern Europe); the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and
the Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957, which largely focused on refugees from war-
devastated Europe and on Soviet Bloc escapees; and the Refugee Act of 1980, which
adopted the United Nations definition of refugees and targeted all refugee groups,
regardless of national origin. Until the end of the 1970s, U.S. refugee policy favored
refugees from communist regimes, but most of these newcomers (with the exception of
Cubans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Soviet Jews) did not benefit from any
government resettlement funds. It was as late as 1980 that federal assistance was extended
to all refugee groups (Bloemraad 2006; Gozdziak 1996).

According to Figure 2, between the 1950s and the 1970s, only a few thousand
Romanian refugees trickled into the United States because of the extremely repressive
measures taken by the Romanian state against fugitives and would-be exiles. But from
1970 until the collapse of communism in 1989, the refugee flow picked up. In the 1970s,
the number of Romanian refugees increased about four times compared to the previous
decade to over 10,000 persons. In the 1980s, when political and economic conditions
became particularly dire in the home country, the number of Romanian refugees more
than doubled compared to the 1970s reaching over 24,000 persons. By 1989, almost
40,000 Romanian refugees had relocated to the United States. Other sources estimate
higher numbers. For instance, Gozdziak (1996) suggests that in the early to mid-1980s
alone over 40,200 Romanians were admitted to the United States under the Refugee Act
of 1980.
Romanians continued entering the United States as refugees for a short period of time once the communist regime collapsed in December 1989. However, refugee status was no longer granted to Romanians afterward. The third wave of Romanian immigration began in the early 1990s (Costoiu 2009; Gozdziak 1996; Robila 2007, 2010). Once the Iron Curtain fell, Romanians (and other Eastern Europeans) were free to leave their countries of origin. Many chose to emigrate in order to join their families. Others wanted escape the lack of opportunities, high unemployment, job instability, and financial hardship brought about by the restructuring of post-communist economies. Yet others left because of endemic corruption at all levels of society, from politics to daily life (Gold 2007; Ispa-Landa 2007; Robila 2007, 2010).

Many of these Romanians came to the United States as part of the family reunification program after spending long years of separation from their relatives during communism. Others came as professionals on employment visas in search of better economic opportunities. Yet others obtained permanent residence under the diversity visa lottery system, which allocates over 50,000 green cards to natives of underrepresented countries in U.S. immigration trends (Ispa-Landa 2007; Robila 2010). There are also Romanians who came to the United States on temporary non-immigrant visas (e.g., student visas) and later adjusted their status to permanent residence.

As indicated in Figure 3, the number of Eastern European immigrants increased steadily after 1990, going up from 1.2 million in 1990 to 2.1 million in 2010. By contrast, the number of Northern, Southern, and Western Europeans registered a steep decline after 1960. The 2.1 million Eastern Europeans of 2010 represent almost half of all the
European immigrants present in the U.S. at the time (Russell and Batalova 2012). Likewise, Romanian immigrants have been growing in number over the past few decades. According to Figure 2, the number of Romanian immigrants granted permanent residence in the United States in the 1990s doubled compared to the 1980s, rising from 24,753 to 48,136. During the early 2000s, it continued to increase to over 52,000. In 2010 and 2011, more than 3,500 Romanian immigrants entered the United States per year as permanent residents. According to the 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimate, about 447,293 (+/- 14,196) individuals currently living in the United States report Romanian origins. These include descendants of early Romanian immigrants, Romanian refugees of the communist era, and post-communist Romanian immigrants. However, Ispa-Landa (2007) argues that the actual number of Romanians is likely to be

Figure 3. Number of European-Born in the United States (1960-2010)
Source: Russell and Batalova (2012)
higher if we take into account two categories of immigrants who are usually not counted by the U.S. Census: the 3,000 to 5,000 Romanian immigrants estimated to enter the country illegally every year and the Romanian immigrants arriving in the United States from Romania’s neighboring countries.

Of course, the number of Romanians in the United States has recently been growing but remains small compared to other more sizeable immigrant and refugee communities. However, as this chapter indicates, the dissertation focuses on Romanians for reasons other than numbers.

3.4. Demographic Characteristics of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees: English Language Skills, Education, Socio-Economic Status, and Naturalization Patterns

The third reason I chose to study Romanian immigrants and refugees is their demographic characteristics. They speak English fluently, have high levels of education, and are generally well-situated socio-economically. They also naturalize more quickly than other recent newcomers. Had it not been for Romanians’ country of origin, these demographic factors would have predicted a smooth integration into American politics. Hence, the main impediment to Romanians’ political integration in the United States is likely to be their experience of political repression. This enables the researcher to focus on the topic of interest of this dissertation, i.e., the processes through which pre-migration experience of political repression lowers the likelihood of immigrant integration into American politics.

In what follows, I discuss the demographic characteristics of the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States: the political refugees of the communist
period (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the U.S. after the collapse of communism in their home country (1990-present).

Romanian political refugees have little in common with the peasants and low-skilled laborers who immigrated to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century (Bobango 1980; Gozdziak 1996). The majority of Romanian political refugees settled in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. They speak English well, with 24 percent in New York and 30 percent in Los Angeles reporting that they were fluent in English upon arrival. Subsequently, many Romanian political refugees took courses to improve their linguistic skills (Cichon, Gozdziak, and Grover, 1986; Gozdziak 1996). In addition, their education level is high, particularly in New York where 53 percent are college graduates and Los Angeles where 45 percent are college graduates. As far as their socio-economic status is concerned, Romanian political refugees have been quite successful (Fruja Amthor 2013; Robila 2010). Many had acquired degrees in accounting, architecture, education, engineering, and medical professions before coming to the United States. After arrival, they managed to secure employment quickly: almost 70 percent found work and became integrated in the American labor market within six months of arrival. Although many obtained initial jobs at lower skill levels than back home, they soon moved up the occupational ladder and some even used refugee assistance to pursue advanced degrees and professional recertification (Cichon, Gozdziak, and Grover, 1986; Fruja Amthor 2013; Gozdziak 1996). Not only have Romanian political refugees done well from a linguistic, educational, and socio-economic point of view, they are also one of the national groups
currently exceeding average naturalization rates by 10 percent or more (Portes and Rumbaut 2006).

As to the Romanian immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism, New York state remains their location of choice. It hosts the largest Romanian community in the United States, which comprises 22 percent of all Romanian immigrants. It is followed by Illinois with 14 percent and California with 12 percent (Ispa-Landa 2007). Recent Romanian immigrants speak English better than most other Eastern European ethnic groups except Estonians, Hungarians, Latvians, and Slovenians (Robila 2007). In addition, Romanians are generally well-educated. The majority of Eastern European immigrants have good levels of education, comparable to the education levels of many Asian groups and considerably higher than the education levels of Hispanics. Romanians report education levels similar to those of Chinese, Koreans, and Japanese. Indeed, over 50 percent of these immigrants have some college education or more. Also, Romanians report much higher education levels than Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans. Over 50 percent of Romanians have some college education or more compared to only 12.2 percent Mexicans, 25.7 percent Puerto Ricans, 26.2 percent Dominicans, and 31.9 percent Cubans (Robila 2010). Together with Bulgarians and Russians, Romanians have the most graduate degrees of all Eastern European immigrants. As many as 20.5 percent of Romanians have a graduate degree (Robila 2007). Recent Romanian immigrants have adapted socio-economically as well. According to Ispa-Landa (2007), they are concentrated in managerial and professional occupations (41 percent), followed by sales and office work (18 percent). The income
levels of Eastern European immigrants are comparable to the income levels of many Asian groups and significantly higher than the income levels of Hispanics. Romanians report mean household incomes similar to those of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans. These immigrants have mean household incomes of about $70,000 per year. Also, Romanians report much higher mean household incomes than Mexicans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans who only make about $40,000 per year (Robila 2010). Not only have Romanians adapted well from a linguistic, educational, and socio-economic point of view, they also belong to European immigrant groups, which currently exceed average naturalization rates by 2 to 18 percent (Russell and Batalova 2012).

3.5. Conclusion

Chapter Three has offered background information on Romanian immigrants and refugees. It discussed in detail the three reasons identified in Chapter Two that this group of immigrants and refugees is an appropriate choice for the dissertation’s research project. Section 3.2 described their country of origin. Romania experienced an extremely repressive communist regime and a difficult post-communist period. As a result, Romanian civil society has been severely weakened. Section 3.3 presented the two recent waves of Romanian immigration to the United States: the political refugees of the communist period (1945-1989/1990) and the immigrants who came to the United States after the collapse of communism (1990-present). Section 3.4 discussed the demographic characteristics of these two waves of immigration, i.e., their English language skills, education, socio-economic status, and naturalization patterns. It argued that these demographics are favorable to political integration. Thus, the main factor holding
Romanian immigrants and refugees back from engaging in politics is likely to be their experience of repressive politics in the home country. Consequently, Romanians are an appropriate group to study for the purposes of this dissertation. They enable the researcher to focus on its topic of interest: the processes through which pre-migration experience of repressive politics filters through immigrant communities and organizations and lowers the likelihood of immigrant integration into American politics.
Chapter Four

“They all turn their back on you…”

Community Fragmentation and Civic Disengagement among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees in the NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area

Motto: “Today’s Romanians have nothing in common except that which prevents commonality and community: their rudeness, their hatred, their individualism, their indifference.”
Gabriel Liiceanu, Întâlnire cu un necunoscut, 177

4.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter Four explores the primary concern of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: community fragmentation. Section 4.2 focuses on the oldest and most active Romanian organization on the East Coast of the United States. It examines how even this relatively successful organization, which has been rescued from oblivion by its leader and brought back to life after years of neglect, is threatened by Romanians’ weak community ties. Section 4.3 extends this discussion to the broader Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. It articulates the ways in which community fragmentation manifests itself within Romanian Orthodox churches, Romanian organizations, and the individual lives of Romanian immigrants and refugees. Section 4.4 explains that Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants are largely similar in their patterns of civic (dis)engagement.

4.2. The Oldest Romanian Organization in New York: Struggles of a “Ghost Organization” Returning to Life

Among my first interviewees was “George,” one of the most active and knowledgeable organization leaders in the Romanian community in New York. Most Romanian
organization leaders are political refugees, but “George” is not. He is one of the few Romanian organization leaders who came to the United States a few years after the collapse of communism in Romania. “George” responded promptly to my request for an in-depth interview and spent several hours telling me about his organization and Romanians in New York and neighboring states. He also agreed to meet with me a few more times after our first get-together to answer further questions and add detail to his stories.

However, “George” warned me that he was one of the few persons willing to respond to an interview request and discuss about Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. When asked about their participation in community life and ethnic organizations (particularly the one he leads), he suggested that we should not even talk about a Romanian community because Romanians in the United States are best defined as a “diaspora,” a word that “comes from the Greek diasporos [sic] meaning ‘dispersion.’” In fact, the word “diaspora” derives from the Greek diaspeirein meaning “to disperse,” but despite the faulty etymology “George” conveyed his main point: Romanian immigrants and refugees are divided and rarely work together to set common goals and accomplish them as a group. “Romanians have no civic consciousness” (personal interview, September 3, 2010), he stated numerous times during this first interview and almost every time I met him afterward.

According to this organization leader, the disunity plaguing the group of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area is most obvious in ethnic organizations. “George” indicated that many Romanian organizations in New York and
neighboring states are “ghost organizations” which function mainly on paper. Most have very few members and cannot claim to represent significant sections of the Romanian émigré community. These organizations are usually torn apart by inner conflicts and have shady reputations. They have no stable headquarters and do not organize regular meetings or activities. Therefore, many are short-lived or subsist only formally without any real content. And even if some organizations do make an effort to remain active, they suffer from low membership, lack of participation in meetings and activities, and unsatisfactory rates of volunteering and donations.

“George” offered the example of his own organization as a case in point. This is an ethnocultural organization which promotes Romanian folk traditions, art, and culture and collects donations for various causes in Romania and the United States. It dates back to 1903 and it is the oldest Romanian organization in New York and the second oldest in the United States. According to “George,” the organization was neglected for decades both during and after communism. By 2000 “it had become a wreck; it was destroyed, it had almost disappeared. The organization no longer existed; it had been reduced to a stack of old papers kept in a storage unit” (personal interview, September 3, 2010). Indeed, the archive of the organization and other valuable items lay abandoned in a basement.

This unfortunate situation lasted until 2006 when “George” took over the leadership of the organization and began the long and difficult process of reviving it. He articulated his reasons for doing so as follows:

The organization does not bring me private gain. I myself have not benefited from this initiative in any way. I do not own the organization; I just keep the flame burning. As a nation, we need an organization to represent all Romanians and promote our culture. I distrust private organizations which have been created to satisfy egos and personal
interests and are aimed at quick and easy gain. (personal interview, September 3, 2010)

By “private organizations,” “George” means organizations founded by Romanians to promote themselves and their interests rather than to serve the community. In his view, Romanian “private organizations” and the various factions which have formed within the Romanian community are detrimental to its well-being.

When he took over the leadership of the organization, “George” realized that very few people still belonged to it. In his own words, “indifference is destructive. We Romanians should be more aware of our duty to the country we came from and to each other.”

According to “George,” in 2006 “only three or four people were nostalgic about the organization and about seventeen persons belonged to the organization on paper. Of these seventeen persons, half were dead and only seven or eight were dues-paying members” (field session, August 24, 2010). The organization had been torn apart by conflicts of egos, money disputes, and warring factions. Mutual suspicion was prevalent among organization members and political accusations were thrown left and right. “George” lamented that to this day Romanians (particularly those who came to the United States as political refugees, but also immigrants who arrived after 1989) have little trust in their co-ethnics and often blame each other for allegedly cooperating with the former communist regime. In his view, “it really is a shame; these things do not honor our community. They radiate negativity and should be thrown to the garbage bin of history. One needs a great deal of strength and determination to put an end to these personal and political fights” (field session, September 8, 2010).
To remedy this situation, “George” has made every effort to reach out to Romanians in New York and neighboring states and raise the number of organization members. Working steadily over time, he managed to “create a capital of trust which is very difficult to achieve within the Romanian community” (field session, September 8, 2010). Currently, the organization led by “George” has ninety-six members including important cultural and religious figures.

Of course, difficulties remain: while the organization membership has increased, most members do not pay their dues regularly and fail to attend organization meetings, activities, and events. Indeed, out of ninety-six members, only six persons attend organization meetings, help plan activities and events, and vote on important issues such as the use of organization resources, the state of the organization web site, and advertising strategies. It is these same people who participate in organization initiatives, while the other ninety members are almost never present on any occasion. Moreover, even these six members are often difficult to convince to come to meetings or represent the organization at various ethnic events, and “George” ends up either cancelling their plans or doing all the work by himself.

In addition, when “George” became organization leader, the organization did not have a space of its own and the extremely few people who still cared about it met at restaurants and churches. “George” considers this situation unacceptable for a serious organization. He intends to affiliate it with the United Nations Organization but the application process requires a stable address for the organization and “George” has been unable to secure one due to an ongoing lack of funds. As mentioned above, most members do not pay their
dues regularly. Hence, the organization does not have enough money to rent a space and only benefits from access to a storage unit where various items of value are deposited.

“George” initiated negotiations with the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York to obtain a space for his organization but the institute remained unresponsive to his requests. He resents the fact that the institute aims to promote Romanian culture to American audiences while making no effort to create ties with the Romanian community in the United States.

Moreover, “George” deplores the organization’s lack of activity prior to his leadership. Until 2006 the few organization members who were left fought among themselves and rarely attempted to do anything constructive. No one bothered to create a schedule of activities and organize them.

“George” argues that under his leadership the organization has come back to life “like a Phoenix bird rising from the ashes” (field session, September 11, 2010). As mentioned above, the goals of the organization are to promote Romanian folk traditions, art, and culture and to collect donations for various causes in Romania and the United States.

“George” has organized a series of activities since he became leader in 2006. One such activity is the yearly anniversary of the organization itself, commonly attended by a few organization members as well as other Romanians from New York and neighboring states. The organization also observes Memorial Day and offers free lunches in memory of deceased Romanian immigrants and refugees.

In addition, it organizes and participates in various ethnocultural festivals. Two examples are the annual spring and fall festivals which gather Romanians together to
celebrate the change of season at ethnic restaurants and churches in New York. Participants include a few members of “George’s” organization and other Romanian immigrants and refugees in the city. Celebrations involve ethnic food, music, and dances, sales of Romanian books, DVDs, and traditional arts and crafts, as well as an itinerant exhibition of Romanian folk costumes. Another festival in which “George’s” organization participates is the annual International Cultures Parade organized by the International Immigrants Foundation in New York. The organization is usually represented by Romanians dressed in folk costumes, bearing their home country’s flags, and playing Romanian folk music. “George’s” organization is also among the few Romanian organizations that run booths at the annual Romania Day Festival on Broadway. “George” commissioned a bust of the most famous Romanian poet to a Romanian sculptor and had it shipped over to New York. He filed a petition with the city of New York to obtain permission to place the bust in a park in Queens in honor of the Romanians living in this borough. Every year he presents the bust at the Romania Day Festival on Broadway together with other items such as pamphlets advertising Romania as a popular destination for tourists, Romanian DVDs, and traditional arts and crafts.

Besides these activities, “George’s” organization makes efforts to collect donations for various causes such as helping Romanian orphans, sending money to Romanian victims of natural disasters, supporting ethnocultural activities of other Romanian organizations in New York, and contributing to funeral expenses incurred by Romanian immigrants and refugees who have had a death in the family.
“George” is proud that the organization has recently experienced a “dense, full, dynamic period” (field session, September 16, 2010). However, he sees this progress as far from sufficient. In his view, there are many other types of activities in which the organization could engage if more members were willing to help and provide material resources and financial support.

Indeed, the organization continues to experience difficulties attracting volunteers to accomplish its goals. As “George” put it during one of our discussions, “the idea of the organization is to keep Romanian culture alive, as well as to help and offer opportunities to Romanian immigrants” (field session, September 8, 2010). However, when it comes to volunteering “many Romanians are simply too closed in on themselves. They claim that they are engaged and willing to do stuff but in fact most of them are amateurs. At best, they become involved to further their own interests. People aren’t interested in volunteering; all they care about is personal gain” (personal interview, September 3, 2010). According to “George,” “Romanian immigrants and refugees do not engage in collective endeavors. No one lifts a finger. Everybody wants to make a profit, everybody wants to gain. But when it comes to volunteering, forget about it. All kinds of organizations disappeared as soon as they came into being without leaving a trace because people aren’t genuinely interested in lending a hand” (field session, September 16, 2010). “George” talked frequently about his struggles to keep the organization active while receiving little to no help from his fellow organization members or other Romanians in New York and neighboring states. He described his efforts to mobilize his co-ethnics as a “Sisyphean” endeavor requiring “colossal” amounts of time and energy
and suggested that his work of volunteering has always been a “one-man show.” He expressed regret that “we [Romanians] haven’t had dedicated people” and warned that “once you devote yourself to these sorts of things [i.e., community-oriented activities], you become a long-distance runner and a lonely person, I could say, because that’s just how things work around here…” (field session, August 24, 2010).

As a result, “George” comes up with initiatives and organizes most activities on his own. He often uses personal funds and resources to accomplish them. For example, he maintains and updates the organization web site and responds to all emails and telephone calls on behalf of the organization. In his view, the organization needs skilled young people interested in improving the internet site and creating an online advertising strategy but such persons have been impossible to find among Romanian immigrants and refugees. As to emails and telephone calls, “George” warned me that I would have difficulties finding other organization members willing to respond to my interview requests through these means of communication. Indeed, my efforts to recruit other interview participants from his organization via email or telephone failed and had it not been for his persistence and power of persuasion, I would not have been able to interview any other organization member.

Moreover, “George” makes all the necessary arrangements for the organization’s anniversary and the spring and fall festivals. He prepares and sends annual invitations to the persons interested in attending these events. In addition, he organizes restaurant dinners, activities that take place during the celebrations (e.g., award ceremonies, guest speeches, children’s games, contests, fashion shows, and raffles), and an exhibition of
Romanian folk costumes which he has collected over time. When asked about this exhibition and how he puts it together for the public, “George” lamented that no one helps him transport the mannequins to restaurants and churches and dress them up for the shows. In describing the fall festival he organized in 2010, “George” recalled, “It took me four days to bring the mannequins to church and dress them up in those stunning folk costumes. I did everything by myself; I did it on my own time and money. I am trying to set an example, but others have to join in for all of this to work” (field session, September 9, 2010). Romanians demonstrate the same lack of interest in the bust of the most famous Romanian poet. As mentioned above, it was “George’s” initiative to commission the bust to a Romanian sculptor and have it shipped over to New York. Since its arrival in New York, “George” has made efforts to obtain permission to place the bust in an appropriate public space with no support from his fellow ethnics. While looking for a permanent space for the bust, every year he rents a van at his own expense and brings it to the Romania Day Festival on Broadway to present it to interested visitors. In sum, “George” organizes most activities and events on his own and is concerned about his fellow organization members’ reluctance to volunteer for the organization. It is only during the annual spring and fall festivals and the Romania Day Festival on Broadway—the most important festivals of the Romanian community in New York and neighboring states—that “George” usually manages to convince a few other members of his organization to help him set up and run the organization booth. But even on these occasions the number of volunteers remains extremely small: only five or six people out of almost a hundred members agree to lend a hand and they are always the same persons.
Reflecting on his experience as organization leader, “George” concluded, “I am glad I have been able to do so many things for my fellow Romanians, but they just don’t care. Lots of people flock to free meals and many love to meet and chat… But when it comes to accomplishing goals, they simply don’t want to get involved. Some do promise to help only to end up claiming that they are ill or something unexpected has come up in their lives and they are no longer able to contribute.” Going back to his metaphor of the organization as a “one-man show,” “George” articulated his worries succinctly but powerfully: “If I don’t take matters into my own hands, nothing gets done” (field session, February 22, 2011). This is by no means an isolated view. In fact, it is very common among community leaders and members of Romanian organizations, as will emerge from the next section of this chapter.

4.3. Community Fragmentation and Its Manifestations in Romanian Churches and Organizations, and the Personal Lives of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees

“George” is one of the most active and knowledgeable Romanian organization leaders in the United States and he talked at length about his organization and the Romanian community in New York and neighboring states. “George” worries about the fragmentation of the Romanian community. According to him, Romanians’ unwillingness to engage in collective endeavors has had a disastrous effect on his organization to the point where he needs to do most of the work on his own if he wants to keep the organization alive.

“George’s” concern is shared by the vast majority of community leaders and members of Romanian organizations in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. They often lament the
weakness or even complete absence of civic interest and participation among their co-ethnics. Of course, many Romanians refer to the friendships they have made and the sense of companionship and well-being they experience when going to ethnic restaurants, attending mass at Romanian Orthodox churches, and participating in various ethnocultural activities and events. However, community fragmentation is the most frequently recurring theme I encountered during fieldwork and interviews, as well as in ethnic media and on social networking sites accessed by Romanian immigrants and refugees. This phenomenon manifests itself at various levels: short-lived ethnic organizations, low membership and participation in established churches and ethnic organizations, and difficulties with planning and organizing ethnocultural activities and events due to unsatisfactory rates of volunteering and donations.

Many Romanian organizations have closed doors over time or are so neglected that they only continue to exist on paper. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the organization led by “George” had been abandoned by its members when “George” became president in 2006: it had very few members (most of them inactive), no stable headquarters, a misplaced archive, and no agenda. This situation is no exception among Romanian organizations in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. “George” himself stated, “There have been several little known Romanian organizations around here [New York and neighboring states]. I’ve heard that there was an organization called ‘Avram Iancu’ and another one called ‘Constantin Brâncuși’… Who are the people running these organizations? Where are these organizations? They have disappeared, vanished into thin air…” (field session, August 24, 2010). Some of my interview participants were vaguely
familiar with these two organizations, but they could not tell me how and why they had ceased to exist. They saw this as a further symptom of the fragmentation of the Romanian community. Along similar lines, a Romanian Orthodox priest told the story of the “Iuliu Maniu” Relief Foundation whose aim was to help Romanians (particularly refugees) achieve social and economic integration in the United States. This organization became inactive in 2009 because it had no financial support and no one wanted to take over its leadership. The organization archive has survived and can be found at a Romanian Orthodox church in Cleveland, Ohio. All these organizations continue to appear on various lists of Romanian organizations in New York and neighboring states, and the “Iuliu Maniu” organization still has a functional web site. However, they only exist on paper as reminders of incomplete or failed community projects.

Active Romanian organizations and churches have their own set of problems. One of the most severe is low membership and lack of participation in meetings, activities, and events. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, the organization led by “George” had only seven or eight members in 2006 when he became president. Membership has increased over time due to “George’s” personal efforts, but participation in organization meetings, activities, and events remains low. Out of more than ninety members, only about five or six are more or less constant participants in the life of the organization. During fieldwork conversations and formal interviews, several Romanian Orthodox priests and church members shared similar worries about the small size and lack of commitment of Romanian churchgoing communities. For example, a priest from New York was concerned about the instability of his parish. He lamented the fact that
only a few older persons attend mass regularly, whereas younger generations come and go without settling down and forming a strong community. In his view, the parish might disappear completely over time with the passing away of elderly members because there are very few young people and even fewer young people with children who come to church. His fears were so intense that he was thinking of leaving his parish in New York and making connections with Romanian communities in New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the hope of finding a more stable group of Romanians and moving there to serve them.

However, in New Jersey and Pennsylvania the situation is largely similar. A priest from New Jersey has so few church members that he tries to attract new ones through all possible means, including by promising to help them with the process of immigration and naturalization in the United States. Another priest from Pennsylvania joked in his Palm Sunday sermon that every Christmas and Easter when churches fill up, priests and church officials start considering the possibility of building additional Orthodox churches to serve the Romanian community. However—he added half facetiously, half in earnest—their enthusiasm soon wanes when they realize that there is no need for new churches because as soon as the holidays are over, the number of churchgoers goes back to “normal,” that is, it drops down considerably. Along the same lines, a member of the Romanian beneficial society in Pennsylvania and a devoted churchgoer asserted that Romanians only “come to church when they need the church” during major holidays such as Christmas and Easter, as well as for marriages, baptisms, and funerals, and then disappear for long stretches of time. As he himself put it, Romanians do not seek the
church to “build community, or donate, or participate” (personal interview, February 27, 2011).

Romanian Orthodox priests are also worried about low participation in parish meetings. For instance, a priest from New York complained that many members of his parish are not interested in participating in parish meetings. Since a certain percentage of the church membership is required to render parish meetings valid (33 percent, in this case), this poses problems to the well-functioning of the church. As a result, he issues regular appeals to church members to come to parish meetings and help make decisions regarding the life of the parish.

Romanian organizations have the same problems with membership and participation. The Romanian beneficial society in Pennsylvania where I conducted participant observation used to have thirty-two members but has recently lost four and is now down to twenty-eight members. Most of them are elderly persons above fifty years of age and less than half participate in organization meetings, activities, and events. During meetings, discussions often revolved around the dwindling number of members and society funds, as well as possible strategies of attracting reliable young members who can save the future of the organization by contributing their time and resources to its needs. However, over a period of more than a year between May 2010 and June 2011 when I immersed myself in the life of this organization, only one young member was added to the society.

Other ethnocultural and religious/charitable organizations in New York and Pennsylvania have anywhere between nineteen members and one single member. The
majority of organization leaders see these numbers as worryingly low. In fact, single-
member organizations are not as rare as one might imagine. Out of a total of twelve
Romanian organizations in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, three are single-member
organizations: a New York-based art organization, an ethnic museum with branches in
Philadelphia and Princeton, NJ, and a media organization operating from Queens, New
York. The leaders of these organizations work largely on their own and the little help
they receive usually comes from family members. They cannot rely on their co-ethnics
for support. The leader of the art organization writes essays, short stories, and plays. She
also raises funds for her organization by selling traditional arts and crafts, mobilizes
actors to play her characters, and organizes stand-ups, plays, and other events to raise
awareness about alcoholism in her home country, the hardships of immigration,
marginalized ethnic and racial communities, domestic violence, and violence against
women. Along the same lines, the leader of the ethnic museum founded the organization
on her own and has led it for more than thirty years. An article titled “Exquisite Eggs.
The Cultural Treasures of the Romanian Folk Art Museum Include a Thousand Eggs,
Lavishly Adorned. A Lack of Public Interest Vexes the Museum Owner” by Frank Visco
published in the Philadelphia Inquirer on March 20, 2008 presents her work in detail.
She has gathered a large and valuable collection of folk costumes, furniture, glassware,
pottery, and traditional rugs and has displayed it at various conventions and exhibitions
throughout the United States. Eventually, she found a stable home for her collection in
Philadelphia and Princeton, NJ. Both the art organization and the ethnic museum enjoy
the appreciation of diverse American audiences. However, what most saddens the two
organization leaders is Romanians’ lack of interest in the activities they work so hard to organize. For instance, the leader of the art organization lamented the fact that many of her Romanian acquaintances promise to attend her events and she prepares accordingly only to find that they have other things to do on the day of the event. Similarly, the leader and only member of the Queens-based media organization founded his ethnic newspaper with the help and encouragement of his daughter. Once the publication was up and running, he started doing all the work on his own: researching topics, writing articles, proofreading, editing, printing, and distributing his newspaper to subscribers. Over the years, he has collaborated with various members of the Romanian community, but these relationships have been temporary and no new members have been added to the organization.

Only one of the thirteen community leaders I interviewed was content with the membership of the religious organization he runs in New York and with people’s participation in its activities and events. The organization is the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality founded in 1993. Its leader described it as a “dynamic spiritual and intellectual space,” a “cradle of culture which brings together the Romanian community in New York and other cities because reports about its activity are published regularly in the Romanian media overseas” (personal interview, June 5, 2011). The institute organizes religious and cultural symposia and a bi-weekly literary circle. It also publishes three journals featuring articles on Orthodox faith and Romanian history, cultural essays, pieces of fiction, and poems presented at its meetings. However, the institute only has five members and a close analysis of event leaflets and presentations
available on its web site romanian-institute-ny.org demonstrates that although the institute hosts a great number of guest speakers, it is largely the same ten to fifteen people who have been organizing all its activities since 1993. The leader of the institute himself deplored the small number of members serving on the editorial board of the journals published by the institute. He makes great efforts to issue these journals regularly with the help of just his wife and three other persons. Thus, the only community leader who declared himself content with the membership of his organization and Romanians’ participation in its activities and events later revealed the serious problems with which the institute has been struggling over time. He also complained about a chronic lack of volunteers and donations, as will be indicated in what follows.

Most community leaders lamented the low rates of volunteering and donations among Romanians, which result in difficulties with planning and organizing activities and events. As indicated in the previous section of this chapter, the organization led by “George” suffers from a chronic lack of volunteers and donations. As a result, “George” has to do most of the work on his own to keep the organization afloat: he makes efforts to find a stable headquarters for the organization and organizes all activities and events, often using his own resources. This story was common among Romanian community leaders. During fieldwork and formal interviews, Romanian Orthodox priests and church members shared their concerns about the scarcity of volunteers in their parishes. Most Romanian Orthodox churches organize various events, from Sunday meals to church anniversaries and ethnocultural festivals and banquets. However, it is often the same few persons who volunteer their time and resources to these community events. For example,
a woman from Pennsylvania who serves as president of her church’s ladies’ committee explained that nothing would get done if she and a couple of other women did not volunteer to organize religious and other ethnocultural events in their parish. They do everything from collecting money to buying the necessary supplies, cooking for large numbers of individuals, and cleaning up after events. This woman did not necessarily want to be president of the ladies’ committee at her church but accepted this responsibility because no one else would. Since nobody has been willing to replace her over the years, she continues serving as president with no prospects of change in the near future. Along the same lines, one priest tried to organize a Romanian-language school affiliated with his church only to see the project fail because he could not find anyone to contribute time and resources to its success. In his view, the Romanian-American community is the only one that has not come together to found ethnic schools for children, while most other ethnic communities have created their own schools and cultural centers. This priest also mentioned a failed attempt to found a math-and-science school for Romanian-American children to complement the inadequate education they get in public schools. As he put it, Romanians simply are not interested in this project because they think that “no one dies from hunger here in America” (field session, May 16, 2010).

As to donations, some Romanian churchgoers give money for Sunday meals, church anniversaries and holidays, items necessary to church life (e.g., candles, crosses, flowers, icons), charitable causes (e.g., helping orphans or victims of natural disasters in the home country), and various ethnocultural celebrations (e.g., spring and fall banquets, folk
concerts, community dances). Most priests take some time at the end of Sunday service to acknowledge these parishioners’ acts of generosity and encourage others to follow their example. However, donations are often seen as few and far between. For example, the parish bulletins of the St. Dumitru Romanian Orthodox church in New York include monthly lists of donors but constantly remind churchgoers that their voluntary contributions are insufficient to the well-being of the church.

Organization leaders struggle with an ongoing scarcity of volunteers and funds as well. In an essay titled “Tendința generală trebuie să fie adunarea—laolaltă” [Our Overall Stance Must be a Desire for Communion] posted on his personal blog theodordamian.wordpress.com, the priest and organization leader who runs the Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York discusses his efforts to publish the three journals of the institute without being able to rely on voluntary work and donations:

I make great sacrifices to publish the journal *Lumină Lină* [Gracious Light] and I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have spoken highly of it. My wife Claudia and I work on this project as volunteers. Claudia does all the technical work, including typing, editing, and, in some cases, illustrations. She is the one who saves every issue of the journal on a memory stick or CD and takes it to the printing house. I as founder of the journal and Mihaela Albu as editor-in-chief decide on the profile of the journal, as well as on finances and the materials to be published. Anca Stuparu Cassablanca and Gellu Dorian help us with other details but the most difficult part is money. I pay for up to 90 percent of the journal expenses out of my own pocket, despite the fact that I myself am not very well-situated financially. Luckily, I haven’t run into problems with my family so far, but we constantly hope for a better solution.

Along the same lines, the leader of the art organization in New York constantly seeks financial support from ethnic businesses but these are reluctant to contribute even small amounts of money to have their logos included in her event brochures. In the artist’s own
words, “either they [Romanian business owners] think they don’t need advertising, or they believe that something very suspicious is going on... that I’m trying to rip them off…” (personal interview, April 14, 2011). The leader of the Romanian ethnic museum with branches in Philadelphia and Princeton, NJ shared a similar story. In the above-mentioned article “Exquisite Eggs. The Cultural Treasures of the Romanian Folk Art Museum Include a Thousand Eggs, Lavishly Adorned. A Lack of Public Interest Vexes the Museum Owner” by Frank Visco published in the Philadelphia Inquirer on March 20, 2008, she lamented the shortage of funds and increased cost of maintaining the museum. However, she argued that the lack of volunteers was an even greater challenge for her organization. Since Romanians “do not care about non-profits,” she feels “responsible to make up for their absence” and has spent the last twenty years collecting, exhibiting, and promoting Romanian ethnocultural items on her own. This organization leader stated with concern: “That’s my worry. If I give up, who will do it? I’m a teacher by profession, so maybe I’m more prone to think about the next generation. I can’t give up on it. The museum represents the whole country of Romania. Maybe I was too idealistic but this is my heritage. It has value and deserves to be preserved.” She had hoped that Romanians in the area would be interested in doing internships at the museum and helping her with various tasks while at the same time gaining valuable knowledge and work experience for their future careers. However, as she herself put it during one of our conversations, “they do not get involved, they do not help, they do not do their share (…) What am I supposed to do if they don’t even visit the museum? (…) On whom should I rely to keep it afloat and avoid selling?” This organization leader has been
advised to give up looking for Romanian volunteers and find volunteers of other ethnic backgrounds to help her at the museum but she feels compelled to work with the Romanian community:

The very idea of giving up working with Romanians and finding volunteers of other ethnicities hurts me deeply. I have been getting this suggestion since the 1980s but I’ve always wanted to do something for the Romanian community since I myself belong to it and am also interested in the history of Romanian immigration to the United States.

However, according to this organization leader, the museum might not have a future because “there are no Romanians to build it” (field session, October 14, 2010). Beside non-profit organizations, some ethnic businesses lack community support and struggle to survive as well. One woman from a small Pennsylvania town recounted the story of a Romanian bakery which went bankrupt because the Romanians in the neighborhood refused to buy from it. According to her, they felt suspicious of the business owner and did not want him to “become rich at [their] expense” (field session, February 27, 2011). Romanians currently get traditional foods for ethnocultural holidays and celebrations from the Russian store. Of course, there are Romanian bakeries, cafés, and restaurants that have been in business for years and are doing well but these are all located in New York. According to one of the community leaders I interviewed, these businesses actually have very small clienteles compared to the much larger size of the Romanian community in the city. There are thousands of Romanians who do not care about ethnic businesses and never go through their doors, let alone buy from them to encourage their growth.

In sum, the most pressing problem for Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area is their fragmented ethnic community. This was the most widely discussed topic during
fieldwork and interviews, and it also comes up frequently in ethnic media and various
online environments accessed by Romanian immigrants and refugees in the tri-state area.
Community fragmentation is worrying for these people because it manifests itself at
several levels: short-lived ethnic organizations, low membership and participation in
established churches and ethnic organizations, and unsatisfactory rates of volunteering
and donations for activities and events. And it is not just existing churches and
organizations that are affected. New community projects suffer as well. Romanians often
experience a sense of helplessness: in their view, any organization or group project they
may start will inevitably face obstacles. Without the backup of a strong community, such
initiatives require tremendous personal effort and expenses and are seen as doomed to
failure because it is hard to find people willing to take over leadership or help out once
the initial leaders and team members have completed their work. For example, a
Romanian immigrant from New York has recently decided to open a Romanian Society
and Community Center in Ridgewood, Queens. Most of his family members, friends, and
acquaintances have been skeptical and advised him against this project arguing that he
would not get the support he needs from other Romanians. An article titled “Centrul
comunitar românesc din Queens s-a inaugurat sămbătă, 2 iunie” [Romanian Community
Center Inaugurated in Queens on Saturday, June 2] posted on the online forum of the
Romanian community in New York Conectii.ro on June 4, 2012 quotes his wife’s
statement:

When my husband first came up with the idea of founding this center, I was
completely opposed to it. He insisted, but I began paying attention to people around us
and what they said about it, and realized that many thought his initiative stood no
chance. Ultimately, though, I decided to go ahead and support my husband. We would
like this community center to be different from everything we have seen on the East Coast. I believe communism destroyed the whole notion of community, but I also want to believe that Romanians have a voice they need to get out there. Most Romanian professionals in New York could not care less about the Romanian community. However, I think that if we look deep into our souls we can awaken our need for each other and start communicating more effectively.

This couple acknowledge the disunity plaguing the Romanian community on the East Coast and the difficulties with which ethnic organizations are confronted as a result. They are aware that they need to swim against the tide in order to found a new organization and keep it alive. Instead of relying on already formed community ties, they must forge these ties if they are to succeed. Indeed, in a promotional message sent out to Romanians in New York and neighboring states and posted on several social media sites including Facebook, they describe their project as a “crazy idea born out of the hope that we Romanians can come together and prove that we are not just isolated groups, but a community that matters.” How long this organization is going to last and whether it will thrive eventually remains to be seen. However, the controversy around its founders’ initiative demonstrates that the Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area see themselves as scattered and are skeptical of their own ability to work together toward common goals.

Community fragmentation is felt outside Romanian Orthodox churches and ethnic organizations as well. Tales of disunity and lack of communitarian spirit abound and cause disappointment, frustration, and outrage among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. One frequently hears about Romanians’ indifference toward their co-ethnics, about the triumph of envy and personal interests over mutual support, and about tensions and conflicts of various kinds. Almost no Romanian I
encountered during fieldwork and interviews recalled having been helped to integrate in
the new society by his or her co-ethnics. The majority said they were completely alone
when they arrived in the United States. They had little money and no family, friends, or
acquaintances to provide support, so they had to make it on their own, often by working
in survival jobs for several years before getting an education or moving on to better
positions. Just one woman artist indicated that Romanians had helped her find a
temporary job at a time in her life when she needed money to pay the bills. However, she
immediately added that this was all the support she had ever received from her co-
ethnics. She then recounted that there are Romanians who hold good positions in
factories, restaurants, and the construction industry and could use their authority to assist
other Romanians but choose to exploit them instead.

Only two interview participants, the Romanian Orthodox priest and leader of the
Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York and the owner of
*New York Magazin* disagreed with this portrayal of Romanian immigrants and refugees
and mobilized evidence in support of their positive views. The Orthodox priest told the
story of a new Romanian organization in New York. No sooner had this organization
come into being than it already split into two other organizations because its leaders had a
fight and felt they could no longer continue to work on the same project. According to the
priest, “this incident might be seen as proof of the disunity governing the lives of
Romanians. I mean, the two leaders didn’t get along, so each of them has become
president of half of the initial organization, so to say… One could interpret this as yet
another piece of evidence that Romanians are a divided community.” However, the priest made efforts to indicate that he thought differently:

I am very much against the widely circulated notion that Romanians are divided. I don’t believe this is the case at all (...) I mean, it’s simply not true. There are divisions everywhere. One only needs to look at what’s going on back home in Romania, for instance... This happens to everybody: Greeks, Hungarians, Poles—they all have their divisions too. It doesn’t mean that we in particular [i.e., Romanians in the United States] are more divided than others. (personal interview, June 5, 2011)

The journalist who disagreed with the notion that Romanians are a fragmented community spoke in almost identical terms. To emphasize his viewpoint against the prevalent negative image of his co-ethnics, he stated that “a bad and false label of dividedness has been applied to the Romanian community in the United States” but hastened to add that he has a different opinion: Romanians are a “community I can only speak highly of.” He indicated that there are six ethnic restaurants in his neighborhood in Queens, gave examples of friendly relations among ethnic businesses, and pointed out that Romanians are people who work hard and never commit crimes. His conclusion was that he would never think of Romanians as a “divided community, or a community that is more divided than others... because, after all, everybody has their little differences: Hungarians, Poles, as well as those born and raised in America. But these are isolated cases. One cannot jump to conclusions or apply a label and say ‘this is a divided community’” (personal interview, March 12, 2011).

Interestingly, however, these two interview participants were deeply familiar with the discourse of community fragmentation. In fact, they confirmed its prevalence even as they attempted to refute it. When asked to describe Romanian immigrants and refugees and their community life in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, both the priest and the
journalist stated that Romanians see themselves as divided and unable to work together on common projects. Then, they proceeded to question this view but instead of mobilizing evidence in support of strong community ties, they claimed that other ethnic communities experience their own conflicts and factional splits. Thus, their strongest argumentative strategy was not to challenge the discourse of fragmentation circulating among Romanian immigrants and refugees, but to minimize its importance by pointing out instances of fragmentation in other ethnic communities. Moreover, later on during the interviews, they discussed several difficulties with which their organizations struggle due to a persistent lack of active members, volunteers, and donors.

4.4. Similar Patterns of Civic (Dis)Engagement among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees

As specified in Chapter Two, there are two groups of Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: one group left Romania before or immediately after 1989 and acquired the status of political refugees in the United States, while the other group left Romania after 1989 and came to the United States as immigrants. How do these two groups of Romanians fare with respect to civic (dis)engagement? Do Romanian immigrants who lived through the collapse of communism and a period of democratic transition at home display different civic practices, modes of interaction, and understandings of community compared to Romanian political refugees who fled during political repression? Are we seeing signs of improvement?

Most of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly Romanians who lived under communism well into their mature years. During fieldwork and interviews, I did not find any significant differences between the patterns of civic (dis)engagement
displayed by Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants. Both groups have low rates of membership and participation in Romanian churches and organizations and are reluctant to do voluntary work and donate for community projects. Romanians are suspicious of other Romanians regardless of their status as political refugees or immigrants and this pervasive distrust prevents collaboration and erodes community ties. The fact that my research participants frequently advised me to “stay away from Romanians” is a good illustration of this problem. As a result, most Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants see their community as disunited. Some even refused to use the notion of “community” in reference to Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area suggesting that a few hundred thousand individuals who come from the same country and live scattered on a new continent do not make up a “community.”

As to community leaders, they are as rare among Romanian political refugees as they are among Romanian immigrants. Many describe themselves as self-standing, isolated individuals who are well aware of the difficulties involved in community engagement. Since neither Romanian political refugees nor Romanian immigrants cooperate well, community leaders cannot count on their support in running organizations and accomplishing community projects.

Only two community leaders (both of whom came to the United States as political refugees) proposed a less pessimistic view of the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area only to end up undermining their own discourse by discussing the serious struggles with which their organizations have been confronted due to persistent lack of support from fellow Romanians.
In sum, Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants are largely similar in their patterns of civic (dis)engagement. This finding may be due to the fact that most of my research participants spent large sections of their lives under communism regardless of whether they came to the United States before or after 1989. It is difficult to say whether young Romanians currently in their late twenties and early thirties who spent just a few years under communism and left the country in early adulthood might be more civically engaged than middle-aged and elderly Romanians, because young Romanians come and go but rarely stick around Romanian churches and organizations. Of course, this too is a sign of disengagement, at least within the Romanian community. Whether young Romanians may be civically engaged outside the Romanian community would be an interesting research topic for a future study.

4.5. Conclusion

Chapter Four has presented the primary concern of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: community fragmentation. For them, this is a pervasive and deeply worrisome phenomenon. Indeed, it was the most prominent topic of discussion during fieldwork and interviews. It also shows up frequently in ethnic media and on various social networking sites accessed by Romanians. Section 4.2 looked at the oldest and most active Romanian organization on the East Coast. The story of this organization illustrates the difficulties with which Romanians in the United States have been struggling since the middle of the twentieth century. Disunity and pervasive lack of support for community projects make organizational success dependent on the determination and personal resources of single individuals. Section 4.3 extended this
discussion to the broader Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. It indicated that the fragmentation of the Romanian community manifests itself at several levels: short-lived ethnic organizations, low membership and participation in active churches and organizations, unsatisfactory rates of volunteering and donations, and lack of support for newcomers who need to integrate into American society. Section 4.4 showed that Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants are largely similar in their patterns of civic (dis)engagement. The next chapter of the dissertation will articulate the link between the fragmentation of the Romanian community and Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences and understandings of home and host country politics.
Chapter Five

“No One Knew Who Was Informing on Whom…”
Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Experiences of Intrusive Politics before and after 1989

Motto: “It has always been obvious to Romanian exiles in the United States that the Romanian Secret Service has made every effort to compromise and silence those leaders of the émigré community who have taken a stand against communism (…) The Securitate has also employed every method of disinformation and means of infiltrating under-cover informers within the Romanian-American community.”

5.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter Five explores how Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area make sense of community fragmentation. Section 5.2 identifies several accounts of community fragmentation advanced by Romanian immigrants and refugees. Of these, narratives of communist and post-communist Romanian politics reaching beyond home country borders and invading the lives of Romanian émigrés in the United States are the most prevalent. Sections 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5 present Romanian political refugees’ traumatic experiences of communist repression in the home country and trace the ways in which it continued shaping their lives in Western refugee camps and the United States. Section 5.6 explores Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences of post-communist Romanian politics which they see as equally intrusive and destructive of community ties in the United States. Section 5.7 shifts to American politics: it shows that Romanian immigrants and refugees have had ambiguous experiences of American politics and therefore see it as more democratic than Romanian
politics in some respects, but also as hypocritical and harmful in others. Section 5.8 explains that Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants are largely similar in their negative experiences and understandings of politics.

5.2. Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Accounts of Community Fragmentation: Stories of Political Intrusions

Chapter Four explored the primary concern of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: community fragmentation. During my fieldwork and formal interviews, I heard the following statement countless times: “Romanians are disunited.” Sometimes it was uttered with annoyance, other times with sadness and resignation, but it was always spoken with the conviction that this was an undeniable fact about Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States. Previous studies of Romanian immigrants and refugees have revealed similar challenges. For instance, Gozdziak writes about Romanian refugees that “about half of the sample examined by RMC\(^1\) socialized very little, even within their own community” (1996, 142). Along the same lines, Costoiu indicates that post-World War II Romanian immigrants and refugees have weaker ties and “fewer organizations and institutions to turn to for community support” than the earlier wave of Romanians who arrived in the United States around the turn of the twentieth century (2009, 223).

Community fragmentation is deeply worrisome to my research participants. As Chapter Four suggests, this phenomenon manifests itself both within ethnic organizations and in the personal lives of individuals. Many organizations founded by Romanians have

---

\(^1\) A 1986 study of refugees conducted by the Research Management Corporation for the U.S. Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement.
closed doors over time, while others continue to suffer from low rates of membership, participation, volunteering, and donations. Also, Romanian immigrants and refugees have received little to no support from their ethnic community to integrate into American society.

The majority of Romanians deplore their lack of cohesion and many hesitate to call themselves a community. But how do they make sense of their disunity? A few Romanians with whom I discussed during fieldwork and interviews mentioned the following reasons: low levels of education, lack of leisure time, and the apathetic or even hostile “nature” of the Romanian people. With regard to education, “George,” the leader of the oldest and largest Romanian organization on the East Coast of the United States, suggested that many Romanians who have founded organizations and got involved in community life are “uneducated” but have “big egos” and “want titles” (field session, September 10, 2010). According to him, these persons are governed by self-interest and lack civic and political vision, knowledge, and experience. They fight for prestigious leadership positions, use organization funds to further their own interests, envy each other’s accomplishments, and argue among themselves while their organizations fail to thrive and to attract new members. This organization leader also stated that most regular members of the Romanian community are civically and politically “illiterate” (field session, September 16, 2010) and do not understand the importance of cultivating strong relationships in order to succeed in American society. This explanation of Romanians’ disunity in terms of low education levels was rare among my research participants. I never encountered it in my fieldwork and it was only advanced by two out of forty-two
interviewees. As stated in Chapter Three, overall Romanian immigrants and refugees (and those living in the New York metropolitan area in particular) have good levels of education, which are comparable to the levels of education of many Asian groups (Robila 2007, 2010). Survey-based studies support my ethnographic finding that education is rarely mentioned as a significant factor in understanding community fragmentation.

A few persons with whom I discussed during fieldwork offered a second reason for Romanians’ fragmented community: lack of leisure time. According to them, Romanians do not participate in ethnic organizations or become involved in their community because as immigrants and refugees they have little leisure time. They need to work hard and take care of their families while making every effort to learn the ropes of their new society and build decent lives for themselves in the U.S. This explanation of Romanians’ disunity in terms of scarce leisure time was rare among my research participants. I encountered it a few times during fieldwork and almost never in interviews. In fact, one of my interviewees who discussed his efforts to mobilize Romanians to volunteer at his organization suggested that many of his co-ethnics invoke lack of time as an excuse to avoid his requests. Granted, several existing studies (Costoiu 2009; Gozdziaiak 1996) do mention lack of leisure time as a possible factor in Romanians’ reluctance to work together toward community goals. Nonetheless, these studies recognize that lack of time only partly accounts for Romanians’ disunity and it is certainly not the most important reason they avoid participation in ethnic organizations and the broader life of the community. Lack of leisure time among immigrants and refugees is usually associated with low levels of education and a precarious socio-economic status. However, as
indicated in Chapter Three, Romanian immigrants and refugees have good levels of education, satisfactory jobs, and decent salaries, so they should not lack time to engage in their community on these accounts (at least not more than other groups of immigrants and refugees). This supports my ethnographic finding that leisure time is rarely mentioned as an important factor in understanding community fragmentation.

Many persons with whom I discussed during fieldwork and interviews offered a third reason for Romanians’ fragmented community: the so-called apathetic or even hostile “nature” of Romanians. Various versions of the following remarks abounded whenever I spent time with Romanian immigrants and refugees at churches, ethnic organizations, and events: “Romanians could not care less about each other. This is just what we are like.” For instance, I was advised by a parish member from Pennsylvania to “stay away from Romanians because not only will they refuse to help you, they will also try to prevent you from accomplishing your own projects” (field session, February 27, 2011). Of course, this essentialist account of Romanians’ weak community ties in terms of their “nature” cannot be taken at face value and requires further investigation. What lies beneath it? What narratives do Romanian immigrants and refugees tell themselves and others about their devastated communities?

During my fieldwork and interviews, one cluster of stories stood out in particular. The vast majority of my research participants referred to the non-democratic and corrupt politics of communist and post-communist Romania as the main cause of their fragmented community. In their view, Romanians politics has reached beyond home country borders and continued shaping their lives as immigrants and refugees in the
United States. Romanian governments and politicians have used devious strategies to infiltrate and divide the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. As a result, mutual suspicion, political accusations, and heated arguments have become prevalent among Romanians living in the area and eroded their community ties.

5.3. Experiences of Repressive Politics in Communist Romania

Most Romanian immigrants and refugees’ experience of non-democratic politics started in communist Romania. Out of forty-two interviewees, only three were children when communism collapsed in Romania in 1989. These young persons felt the effects of communism for just a few years during their childhood and remember it vaguely; most of what they know about life under communism has been passed on by their parents. However, the majority of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly individuals. Whether they came to the United States before or after 1989, they spent their youth and much of their adulthood under communism and have many stories to tell about political intrusions in their lives prior to migration. They spoke about the sensation of suffocation and the feelings of fear, helplessness, frustration, resentment, and distrust of others that repressive politics generated among Romanians before the revolution of December 1989.

My research participants’ experiences of repressive politics cover the entire spectrum of citizen abuse by the state, from obligatory participation in staged events organized in honor of the country’s dictatorial couple (Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu) to censorship, verbal threats, termination of employment, physical harassment, and imprisonment. Forced attendance at state-sponsored public events was common in communist Romania.
Citizens were frequently mobilized to participate in mass parades and demonstrations organized as part of Ceaușescu’s cult of personality (Gabanyi 2000). Indeed, most of my research participants went through such experiences, even as small children. For instance, one parish member from Pennsylvania remembered being sent by the institution he worked for to the Băneasa airport in Bucharest to greet Ceaușescu upon his arrival from a trip abroad. He and his colleagues were made to stand in three parallel rows and wait for Ceaușescu to get off the plane. Behind them were Securitate agents whose job was to put pressure on people to make sure everyone would chant and applaud enthusiastically when the dictator arrived.

Several research participants also experienced the tight grip of censorship, which was particularly harsh under Gheorghe-Gheorghiu Dej’s Stalinist rule of the 1950s and the early 1960s and reached a peak again under Ceaușescu during the 1970s and the 1980s. In her preface to the book Censorship in Romania, Lidia Vianu asks, “What was censorship? In simple terms, it meant an enormous ‘NO!’ Unless you praised communism, the ‘new man,’ and the two Ceaușescus and the bright future of their eternal order, you could not publish. Words, images, ideas, a list of the most unimaginable offenses—all were banned” (1998, ix). Indeed, one of my interviewees from New York played the guitar and sang folk music in communist Romania. He could not express himself freely in his art and felt so constrained in his choices that he decided to escape his home country and immigrate to the United States. As he himself put it, “I was a freelancer as were all the musicians and visual artists I knew. We were making good money and enjoyed material comfort; we could even travel abroad… But I ran away from
Romania and requested political asylum in the United States because I was subjected to cultural persecution” (personal interview, March 12, 2011).

There were also persons who became the target of verbal threats and termination of employment because they had spoken up against the regime or defied it in other ways, e.g., by communicating with relatives living in the West. One interviewee from New York explained that in 1977 he had signed a letter of protest against the Ceaușescu regime and its violations of human rights. As a result, he and his family members began receiving anonymous messages warning them to “keep their mouths shut or else we will shut them for you” (personal interview, June 7, 2011). They felt threatened and went to the Austrian Embassy in Bucharest to request political asylum. This was eventually granted to them and they were able to leave the country and resettle in the United States. Another interviewee from New York told me that his sister-in-law had relocated to the U.S. while he and his family were still living in communist Romania. They kept in touch and in the early 1980s the man decided to apply for a U.S. visa together with his wife and two children. His sister-in-law helped by writing letters of support to the Romanian government in order to prevent political abuse. Nonetheless, the man received multiple threats about his efforts to leave the country and was fired from his job as an engineer. He remained unemployed for two years and finally obtained approval to emigrate after three years of fear and uncertainty.

Some of my research participants went through even harsher experiences such as interrogations by the Securitate, physical abuse, and imprisonment. Several books of memoirs by Romanian political refugees recount the physical and mental tortures these
people endured in high-security communist prisons and labor camps before escaping the Soviet bloc and resettling in the United States. Nicholas Dima’s *Journey to Freedom* presents a detailed account of Dima’s five-year long sentence executed in some of the harshest prisons and labor camps of communist Romania during the 1950s and early 1960s. Together with two friends, Dima had attempted to flee across the border but was caught by the guards and brought to trial. He was moved from prison to prison, interrogated, beaten, tortured, and psychologically abused, and later subjected to forced labor in government camps. Referring to his experience in the Gherla prison, he writes:

Every day the regime grew stricter. We were not allowed to lie on our beds in the daytime, and suddenly a rule of silence was imposed on us. If anyone was caught lying down or heard speaking in more than a whisper, he was immediately taken to an isolation cell in the basement, which was a “standing cell” no bigger than an upright cupboard. That person was frequently beaten by a special team of guards who had obviously lost their human qualities, if they ever had any. I often wondered what kind of training these men underwent that made them so inhuman and submissive to their boss’s orders. How I hated those individuals, and how much I wanted revenge despite my prayers. This alone, praying while hating, made me question my Christianity.

(Dima 1990, 212)

Some of my research participants went through similar ordeals. For instance, one organization leader from New York was considered an anti-communist dissident because he had attempted to send several letters to the Romanian section of Radio Free Europe, the Western broadcasting agency which delivered news and anti-communist political commentary to the Soviet bloc. This international broadcasting agency was very popular with Romanian citizens living under communism. In the 1980s, it regularly received letters from Romanians describing the horrors of life in communist Romania (Andreeescu and Berindei 2010). Ceaușescu resented its influence among Romanians and ordered the *Securitate* to take harsh measures against the editors and collaborators of Radio Free
Europe (Ratesh 2010). Thus, my interviewee was threatened, fired from his job, abused, and severely interrogated about his collaboration with Radio Free Europe. Later on, he attempted to cross the border illegally to escape persecution and was caught and sentenced to jail. He spent a few months in prison, but he had already contacted the American Embassy in Bucharest to explain his situation and ask for support. As a result, he was released and eventually allowed to leave the country and immigrate to the United States.

5.4. Communist Repression beyond Romanian Borders: Political Invasions of Western European Refugee Camps as Transitional Spaces

Given their unfortunate experiences of repressive politics, many of my research participants left communist Romania and came to the United States as political refugees. Of course, emigration and defection were extremely difficult for Romanians due to heavily policed borders and the severe restrictions placed by the regime on trips to Western countries. Recently released documents of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party demonstrate that Nicolae Ceaușescu himself, along with the highest echelons of the nomenklatura, took a close interest in Romanian emigration and defection. Party officials requested thorough lists of persons who had obtained permission to travel abroad and remained in the West or attempted emigration or defection through other channels. The lists provided yearly quantitative data and details concerning the names, occupations, personal life, and psychological profiles of exiles and defectors as well as their relatives at home. Annexes to these documents contained analyses of the reasons Romanian citizens might have had in escaping to the West and strategies of controlling the population more efficiently and reducing emigration and
defection (Dobre and Taloș 2006, 187-269). Nonetheless, my research participants, along with thousands of other Romanians, devised means of fleeing their home country.

Some were bold enough to ask the Romanian government for permission to emigrate to the West. Such requests were usually unsuccessful: they resulted in extremely long waiting times and negative answers after years of fear and uncertainty; if one continued to press for the right to emigrate, one could be harassed, fired or demoted to a lower paying position, denied medical assistance and other benefits, interrogated, beaten up, tortured, and even imprisoned (Pilon 1985, 7-8). As recounted in a letter smuggled to Radio Free Europe and broadcast in April 1983, twelve individuals had attempted to send a petition to the U.S. Congress to ask for support in their efforts to leave Romania and immigrate to the United States. They were caught, put on trial, and imprisoned in a high-security penitentiary. “During detention, most members of the group were beaten up with rubber batons and one of them, Constantin Lucian, was locked up for five days in the torture room or ‘isolation room’ as the Securitate called it” (Andreescu and Berindei 2010, 144). Emigration requests tended to be more successful when initiated by individuals who had relatives or acquaintances in the Western world or were otherwise able to make themselves known in the West, e.g., by having their stories broadcast on Radio Free Europe. Since Ceaușescu did not want to spoil the popularity he enjoyed for a while in the Western world, he refrained from harming them and even allowed or forced them to emigrate.¹ Several of my research participants used this strategy to leave

---

¹ In 1968 Ceaușescu denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and emphasized the importance of national sovereignty, thereby distancing himself from Soviet foreign policy within the Eastern bloc. This move won him favor with the United States and the rest of the Western world (see, for instance, D. Petrescu 2007; C. Petrescu 2013). As a result, a trade agreement between Romania and the United States
Romania and resettle in the United States. For instance, a man who had signed a petition against the violation of human rights by the Ceaușescu regime became well-known in the West and was placed under the protection of the American Embassy in Bucharest as soon as he requested permission to leave the country. Consequently, he was allowed to emigrate together with his wife and daughter but he still recalls the stressful train ride that took him from Romania through the former Yugoslavia to Austria:

> When we arrived in Cluj,¹ I was ordered to get off the train for a check-up. My wife said, ‘Don’t get off the train. The train’s going to leave and we’ll be left here all alone. If they suspect anything wrong, they’re going to arrest you.’ Then, as we left the city of Cluj, the train conductor kept checking on us every hour or so; he kept checking our passports. And there were also four individuals watching us from the compartment next to ours. We thought we would feel safe when we had left Romania behind… But in fact it was only when we reached Austria and the Austrian train conductor came in to check our tickets that we said ‘Amen!’ The train moved on and we saw signs written in German and I told my wife, ‘We’ve made it! We’re in Austria!’ We were happy. (personal interview, June 7, 2011)

Other research participants obtained permission to spend short periods of time abroad to visit their families, travel, study, attend conferences, or work and decided not to return to Romania. One man and his wife traveled to the former Yugoslavia as tourists. They decided to cross Yugoslavia by car and escape to Austria. The couple hoped that they would be safe if they made it to the Austrian border but their doubts and fears persisted until the very moment they were allowed to enter Western Europe:

> We got to the Austrian border by car. It was very crowded; a lot of Austrians were returning from their summer holidays that day. The Austrian border officer kept

---

¹ A city in Western Romania a few hours away from the border.
waving his hand and let everyone pass, but when he saw our license plate he stopped us. We thought it was all over and they were going to send us back to Romania. But the officer only asked for our car insurance and let us in. (field session, April 17, 2011)

This man and his wife were relieved to find themselves in the free world. However, things did not go as smoothly for all my research participants. Trips to Western countries were conditional upon leaving one’s closest family members behind (most notably children) and signing an agreement with the Romanian government that one would not criticize the communist regime in the West. In such cases, family considerations made emigration extremely difficult. Few people dared to remain in the West and request political asylum while leaving their spouses, children, and parents at home. They knew that family members would be subjected to pressure by the regime and would have a hard time joining them in their host countries. Officially, the Romanian government permitted the emigration of political refugees’ spouses, children, parents, and other close relatives for family reunification purposes but in practice this process took years and involved not just a great deal of bureaucratic work but also surveillance, threats, harassment, job loss or demotion, and interrogations. Nevertheless, several of my research participants chose this route out of the country. For instance, the above-mentioned guitar player and pop singer who wanted to escape censorship requested permission to travel to New York to play music and visit his sister. He decided to remain in the United States while his wife and daughter were still in Romania. As he himself put it,

I ran away but my family stayed behind. Ceaușescu was still in power at the time and they [the Securitate] started harassing my wife. They got her fired from her job, they called her on the phone and threatened her hoping she would convince me to return. She was under a lot of pressure. But then I got my political refugee status in the United States and she was placed under the protection of the American Embassy in
Bucharest. Most threats ceased at that point and we got lucky because the revolution broke out in just a few months. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)

Persons who did not have spouses or children at home found it easier to remain in the West but even they feared for their parents and other close relatives. In his book of memoirs Unbelievable Spiritual Experiences of an Immigrant Believer of the Christian Faith. The Truth of an Untold Story, Dumitru Cânstea, a Romanian political refugee who settled in Pennsylvania, recalls: “I had left the rest of my family in Romania: my parents, two brothers, two sisters, and at least six nephews. Their life would have been put in severe jeopardy if I had spoken up about everything I had endured [under communism]” (2011, 82).

Yet other research participants crossed the border illegally, escaped to the former Yugoslavia or Hungary, and made their way to Western Europe and North America. This strategy was extremely dangerous. As recounted in a letter broadcast on Radio Free Europe in March 1981, a young man traveled to a town located on the border between Romania and the former Yugoslavia for therapeutic purposes. He raised suspicions among local authorities that he intended to cross the border illegally, so he was arrested together with a friend and subjected to endless interrogations. As he himself explained, “During the investigation, we were spoken to in such foul language as one would only hear from people with no education at all and no compassion for their fellow human beings. We were also threatened very harshly. They told us we would be beaten with a special device which made people groan and tore the flesh from their bones” (Andreescu and Berindei 2010, 95). Of course, much tougher measures were taken against persons
who had actually tried to cross the border illegally. One immigrant from New York declared in an interview:

In the late 1980s, my relationship with the Romanian government was extremely tense. I was considered a dissident. I had been questioned, interrogated, arrested for certain periods of time, and even sentenced to jail. I had tried to collaborate with Radio Free Europe and requested permission to leave the country and resettle in the United States. This cost me a great deal: I was fired from my job and thrown out of my apartment. Then I attempted to cross the border illegally because I had no other choice at that point, so I was brought to trial and condemned to forced labor. (personal interview, May 21, 2011)

Eventually, this man made it out of Romania because the American Embassy in Bucharest pressured the Romanian government to give him permission to leave the country. His case illustrates the dangers Romanians faced if they attempted to cross the border illegally. Nevertheless, some of the Romanians I met during fieldwork and interviews chose this route out of the country.

Once they had left the Soviet bloc behind, many of my research participants spent several months in Western European refugee camps (particularly those located in Traiskirchen, Austria and Latina, Italy) before making it to North America. In the camps, they worked, made acquaintances and friendships, and took care of their families while waiting for their immigration applications to be approved by host countries. During fieldwork and interviews, Romanian refugees revealed an unexpected fact. Their experience of political repression did not end when they escaped their home country and entered the free world. In fact, their lives in the refugee camps continued being shaped by the Romanian communist regime: they felt frightened, watched, threatened, and harassed both directly and indirectly through the pressure put on their relatives back home. Most Romanians who spent time in refugee camps told stories about Securitate agents
infiltrated in these transitional places to spy and inform on them. For instance, one of my research participants recalled an elderly woman who, despite all appearances to the contrary, was an under-cover *Securitate* informer and used all occasions to ingratiate herself with Romanian refugees, pry into their lives, and extract their secrets. Along similar lines, one of my interviewees told me that Romanian refugees in the Austrian camp at Traiskirchen identified a *Securitate* agent and locked him up in a steel file cabinet to scare him off and thwart his attempts to meddle with their lives. Such stories abound and while it is close to impossible to determine with certainty how many agents of the Romanian *Securitate* were sent to the refugee camps of Western Europe and who these individuals were, suspicions caused by political intrusions were prevalent among Romanian refugees. Romanians were intensely wary of other Romanians, particularly those who tried to make acquaintances and friends. This distrust prevented them from forming strong community ties. Another strategy used by the communist regime to divide Romanian refugees was sending ordinary prisoners into exile. Once these prisoners flooded the refugee camps in Western Europe, frequent instances of misbehavior made it difficult for Romanian political refugees to relate well to other Romanians. One of my interviewees recalled:

Sometime during the month of March, about two months after we’d arrived at the camp [Traiskirchen, Austria], Ceaușescu released hundreds of ordinary prisoners. He allowed them to leave Romania and come to Austria, so they were all brought to Traiskirchen. Violence broke out in the refugee camp. Those former prisoners started fights with Romanians, Albanians, Yugoslavs… some people died as a result. Of course, Ceaușescu did it on purpose to harm the reputation of Romanian political refugees. Yes, indeed, that was his goal. (personal interview, June 7, 2011)
Romanian refugees in Western European camps also felt the tight grip of the Romanian communist regime indirectly through problems experienced by their relatives at home. In a letter broadcast on Radio Free Europe in March 1981, a Romanian refugee in the Austrian camp at Traiskirchen stated:

When I left the country, my wife was summoned to the police station to report on my brothers and my brothers-in-law. She had to write down every detail about their education and occupations. After a while, we saw the results of these interrogations: one of my brothers and one of my brothers-in-law who worked as civil employees at a border control unit in Jimbolia were fired without being offered employment anywhere else.

The letter continues with details about the coercion exerted on this man’s other relatives and ends with his plea that “my family must not suffer and be held accountable for the choice I have made” (Andreescu and Berindei 2010, 96).

Thus, Romanians who decided to leave the country permanently before the fall of communism experienced political pressure not just while pushing against the border in their efforts to escape the Soviet bloc, but even as they settled in Western European camps as political refugees. Surprisingly, repressive politics continued affecting their lives in these transitional spaces of the free world. Romanian political refugees felt frightened, watched, threatened, and harassed by the regime they thought they had left behind.

5.5. The “Long Arm” of Romanian Communism: Political Intrusions in the NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area before 1989

Political intrusions continued shaping the lives of Romanian refugees for decades even as they settled in the United States. All my research participants in the NY-NJ-PA

---

1 A town located on the border between Romania and the former Yugoslavia.
metropolitan area talked about the pressure exerted by the “long arm” of the Romanian communist regime and the divisions it caused within their ethnic community.

Incipient research has begun revealing the Romanian communist regime’s interest in Romanian émigrés and the methods it employed to fragment and control their communities. Dobre and Taloș (2006) is a collection of reports and minutes of party meetings from the late-1960s which demonstrate that Nicolae Ceaușescu himself, along with the party nomenklatura, saw Romanian émigrés as a political threat and requested detailed statistics on them. Long lists of names of hundreds of persons of Romanian origin living outside the home country were compiled and submitted to the party leadership. According to a 1967 report put together by the Department for Agitation and Propaganda in collaboration with other ministries and departments of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the majority of Romanian émigrés lived in the United States and Canada (about 450,000), but significant numbers were also found in West Germany, France, Brazil, Argentina, and other countries. Special top-level party meetings were held to discuss the alarming activity of “reactionary” (i.e., anti-communist) Romanian communities abroad and the need to create “progressive” (i.e., pro-regime) communities through various means: coopting important figures and leaders of Romanian émigrés, distributing propaganda materials, organizing “patriotic” events (e.g., ethnocultural celebrations and festivals), sponsoring the establishment of regime-friendly gathering places (e.g., ethnic stores and restaurants) in the hope that they would become useful information grounds, and infiltrating existing churches and ethnic organizations with loyal agents whose task was to spread pro-regime propaganda,
discredit vocal anti-communists, and collect information about émigrés (136-55).

Romanian Orthodox churches were of particular interest to party officials. The 1967 report mentioned above states:

Since the church is so influential among émigrés and maintains with such efficiency the cohesion of certain groups of émigrés and their spiritual relationship with the home country, the Orthodox Patriarchy in Bucharest and the Department of Religious Cults must become more active in supporting Romanian religious communities outside the country. For this purpose, it is necessary to support the creation of new Romanian Orthodox parishes abroad, to improve the relationship between existing ones and the home country, to send over priests and religious materials, to invite priests from various immigrant parishes to visit the home country, and to educate young priests at our theological seminaries. The Department of Religious Cults must devise an annual plan containing concrete measures in regard to parishes abroad. (145)

A former Securitate officer explained how this plan was put into practice:

This information network [of priests] was gradually educated in a nationalist, chauvinist, and xenophobic spirit. Church leaders were supervised by the intelligence and counterintelligence departments, were subjected to complex training programs, and sent abroad to serve their socialist country by collecting information, participating in national-communist propaganda activities and disinformation campaigns, providing false information on emigration leaders, infiltrating Radio Free Europe, and mending the broken image of Romania and its communist leadership. (Stan and Turcescu 2007, 79)

It is, of course, extremely difficult if not altogether impossible to determine precisely how many informers made their way into Romanian communities abroad before 1989, who these people were, and what they did once communism collapsed. In 2006, Romanian President Traian Băsescu assembled a special commission of scholars and experts (the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania) and assigned them the task of putting together a comprehensive report on the Romanian communist regime. The Final Report (CPADCR) states that “SIE [the current Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service] has not given the Commission permission to
examine the *Securitate* files on the infiltration of Romanian exile parishes with priests
controlled by DIE/CIE [the Directorate/Center for Foreign Intelligence of communist
Romania]” (2006, 467). Concrete and detailed information about the *Securitate* agents
sent abroad remains unavailable to this day.

Romanian political refugees were deeply affected by the strategies employed by the
communist regime to fragment and control their communities in the NY-NJ-PA
metropolitan area. The vast majority of the people with whom I conversed during
fieldwork and interviews stated that before 1989 Romanians had developed an obsession
with the *Securitate* informers in their midst. One political refugee recalled:

> Waves upon waves of immigrants were bringing in fresh blood of *Securitate*
collaborators. Some came to study, others for family reunification purposes, yet others
to enjoy the thrill of an adventurous life, and so on. It is too vast a topic to address in a
book shorter than five hundred pages. We can refer to Solzhenitsyn, who said that the
KGB had no use for so many collaborators to collect information; they actually ended
up informing on each other, that’s how many they were. In fact, the KGB sought to
regiment, break, crush, mutilate, destroy, and annihilate them—briefly put, to ruin
forever their capacity to bite the hand that beat them. On the other hand, throw three
*Securitate* informers in a community of a thousand people and everyone will suddenly
become paranoid and start identifying two hundred informers instead. They [regime
officials] weren’t stupid; they borrowed their weapons from the Russians, who had
made great progress in the field. (personal communication, May 29, 2011)

As this interview excerpt indicates, Romanians oscillate between a sense of certainty
about the identity of the *Securitate* informers in their community and great confusion in
this regard. On one hand, according to many persons with whom I discussed during
fieldwork and interviews, it was obvious that some of the Romanians who had come to
the NY-NJ-PA area prior to 1989 were sent by the communist regime to spy on their
fellow ethnics: as several parishioners from a Romanian Orthodox church in
Pennsylvania put it in a casual group conversation, one could see “from a mile away” that
many Romanian priests “weren’t priests at all” and had no theological training (field session, February 22, 2011). On the other hand, I witnessed heated debates about whether certain community members had indeed belonged to the Securitate or not. In a discussion about a priest from New Jersey, two parishioners disagreed over his past: one of them recounted that the priest had accompanied Romanian Patriarch Teoctist to Vienna prior to 1989 and chose to escape to the United States rather than return to communist Romania; the other parishioner expressed doubts about this story suggesting that the priest had only pretended to be a political refugee in order to gain the trust of the Romanian community, blend in, and put himself in a better position to inform on people. In his book of memoirs *Journey to Freedom*, Nicholas Dima, an anti-communist Romanian dissident and political prisoner who fled to Western Europe and settled in the United States in the late 1960s, describes the state of confusion prevalent among Romanian political refugees:

> Romanian exile communities in the West have literally been invaded by thousands of individuals of all attitudes, making it impossible to tell who is who. Some of them acted oddly, and personally I came to the definite conclusion that exile communities were systematically infiltrated. (1990, 342-3)

Along the same lines, Dima reproduces the words of Brutus Coste, a Romanian diplomat and important figure of the Romanian émigré community:

> “There is so much confusion among newcomers,” Professor Coste confessed one day. “Many of them cannot even distinguish right from wrong anymore. Having lived a double standard all their lives, having been cheated, lied to, and deceived for so long, many of them can no longer believe in honesty and idealism. What a world! I have met kings and presidents, legislators and leaders, journalists and educators. I always

---

1 Brutus Coste belonged to the Romanian Diplomatic Service between the two world wars. Once the communist regime came to power in Romania, he broke relations with the Romanian government. In 1947, Coste settled in the United States and engaged in intense anti-communist political activities. Among other things, he was Director of the International League for the Rights of Man and Secretary General of the Assembly of Captive European Nations, an organization founded in 1954 by representatives of nine Eastern and Central European nations under Soviet domination.
warned them about communist danger, but I never imagined that it could get so evil and capable of blurring everything. It is so much more difficult now to separate the good from the evil,” he said sadly. (342)

Confusion about “who was who” in Romanian communities resulted in widespread suspicion. Many people with whom I discussed during fieldwork and interviews suggested that Romanian refugees were extremely cautious before 1989: they regarded each other with distrust because “no one knew who was informing on whom.” One interviewee explained: “A powerful sense of distrust prevailed in our community. Newcomers in particular were always carefully ‘weighed’ and examined by older members of the community” (personal interview, June 7, 2011). In Journey to Freedom, Dima (1990) recalls that some Romanians had doubts about Brutus Coste himself despite the fact that the former Romanian diplomat had taken up multiple leadership positions in the United States in an effort to raise awareness about the horrors of Soviet-style communism and fight against the repressive regimes of Eastern and Central Europe: “I did not want to sadden Professor Coste any further, but some of the new immigrants even questioned his dedication, and believed that somebody was probably paying him to do what he was doing” (342).

Romanian refugees worried about political intrusions in their churches and ethnic organizations and the dissension they created. Most of my research participants talked about informer-priests and under-cover Securitate agents sent by the Romanian communist regime to infiltrate Romanian-American Orthodox parishes, spread pro-regime propaganda, collect information on exiles, and divide people. Even priests who
had spent years in the darkest communist prisons were suspected of collaboration with
the regime (Marinescu 2009, 757-68). In Journey to Freedom, Dima states:

[T]he Romanian Patriarchate, obviously with the blessing and under the guidance of
the Party, makes every conceivable effort to organize and open as many churches as
possible wherever Romanians live in the West in large numbers, especially in the
United States. It even supplies those churches with priests and pastors. The truth is
that without them, it would be extremely difficult for the Secret Police to even find out
where the escaped and emigrated Romanians are. It is easy for the Secret Police to
infiltrate Romanian churches, and through them to control exile communities. (1990,
342)

Church infiltration was one of the most worrying thoughts of Dumitru Cârstea, a political
refugee who settled in Pennsylvania. In his book of memoirs Unbelievable Spiritual
Experiences of an Immigrant Believer of the Christian Faith. The Truth of an Untold
Story, he recalls a revealing encounter with a Romanian Orthodox priest soon after he
arrived in the United States:

Father came to our house to check on us and invite me to the Romanian Church.
During our discussion, he observed a timidity and a lack of openness on my part. My
body language also exhibited the fear of being heard and getting into trouble as was
the case back home in Romania. Freedom of expression was new to me, so I was
cautious in my conversations. I tried to deceive myself and the priest by refraining
from talking about the dire situation of churches in Romania. At one point, he told me
firmly, “You are in America, not in Romania. Don’t be afraid to talk. There is no
Securitate here to harm you. Why do you keeping looking anxiously left and right?
We know conditions there were difficult. No reason to cover it up! Other people told
us about it and we listen to the news on the radio and television every day. Relax now,
you are in a free country. Enjoy it and thank God that you are here with your wife and
child.” These words had a big impact on me. The priest was right in all respects except
one. There were Romanian communist agents in America who shadowed Romanians.
Some of them could have been there at his parish without his knowledge. (2011, 82)

Most Romanian refugees spoke in pessimistic terms about the infiltration of Romanian
Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area prior to 1989. The members of
the Romanian Orthodox parish in Pennsylvania where I conducted fieldwork recall that
churches were almost empty before 1989 and remained so for years after the fall of communism. Nobody would attend mass, confess, take communion, or participate in church activities because “one could immediately tell that the priests had nothing whatsoever to do with religion” (field session, February 22, 2011).

According to my research participants, such instances of church infiltration abounded and led to the multiplication of churches. Romanian émigrés often worked hard to buy or build a church only to realize that the Romanian communist regime made efforts to send informer-priests and Securitate agents under cover to take over the newly formed parish. Suspicions of newcomers ran high, political accusations were thrown left and right, and scandals broke out. Many church members would then leave the infiltrated church and set up a new church. Consequently, the number of churches rose in the area. One Romanian political refugee from New York explained:

There were Securitate officers and some of them were priests who had been sent over to divide the community. This is the reason we have seven small churches the size of this restaurant instead of one big church the way we should, because we are all Christian Orthodox after all. There was only one trustworthy priest around here. He was my mentor, so to speak, and died at the age of ninety-three. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)

Along similar lines, Aurel Sergiu Marinescu, a Romanian political refugee from New York, recounts in the ninth volume of his book *O contribuție la istoria exilului românesc* [A Contribution to the History of Romanian Exiles] the “well-known struggle between the faithful founders of St. Mary Church in New York and a pro-communist intruder wearing a priest’s cassock.” In his own words, the priest “took over our church in a fraudulent manner, drove us away from it, and later engaged in dirty maneuvers to force us out of two other churches with the Bishop’s support.” Another well-known Romanian
Orthodox priest suspected of collaboration with the communist regime came to New York to “assess the situation of our church” but did not use the information he collected in our favor. Rather he tried to benefit those who sent him. The fact that he stood by the Romanian Patriarch who ‘blessed’ us with our intruder priest is proof of his betrayal of our cause” (2009, 765).

Another reason for the multiplication of Romanian Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area prior to 1989 was the Romanian communist regime’s policy of sponsoring the establishment of new churches led by “patriotic” priests. These churches were usually avoided by most Romanian refugees who had lived in the neighborhood long enough to know how they came into being. For Romanian refugees, church affiliation was an indication of whether or not a particular church had been founded by the Romanian communist regime: if the church was affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy in Bucharest, it had likely been founded by the regime; if, however, it was affiliated with the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America, it was less likely to have been founded by the regime.

Romanian refugees’ negative view of the multiplication of Romanian Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area prior to 1989 challenges a common assumption of the literature on immigration and civic and political integration. Scholars of immigration and integration see numerous organizations as an indication of a healthy, thriving, and active immigrant community (see, for instance, Bloemraad 2006). However, Romanian Orthodox churches increased in number because people kept abandoning churches that had in their view been infiltrated or established by agents of the Romanian
communist regime and creating new ones. Far from being an indication of a healthy and active refugee community, the relatively high number of Romanian Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area points to the fear, suspicion, and disunity generated by the interference of the communist regime with the life of Romanian political refugees. Many Romanians still deplore their dispersion and wish that they had been able to come together to form a strong, united church rather than several weak ones.

Romanian ethnic organizations were also deeply fragmented by political intrusions. The oldest Romanian organization in New York is a good example in this regard. Before 1989, this organization was closely associated with a Romanian Orthodox church. The organization and the church decided to buy a common building where Romanians could hold both community activities and religious services. However, their relationship soon deteriorated because the affiliation of the church with the Romanian Orthodox Patriarchy in Bucharest raised suspicions of collaboration with the Romanian communist regime. As political accusations, quarrels, and fights broke out, the priest and his supporters within the organization became the main targets of people’s resentment. A book devoted to the history of the organization describes the situation as follows: “Romanian refugees spent years and great amounts of energy to prove that several persons, particularly the leaders of the organization, belonged to the communist Securitate” (Traian 2003, 70). Further on, it states that “[t]he ghost of the Cold War (…) had spoiled the atmosphere of the organization to such an extent that its very existence came under threat. The cohesion of the organization and the space allocated to it within the church were both jeopardized.” As a result, “[t]he organization forgot about its purpose and focused exclusively on
internal dissension and the war it waged against the church” (75). The author of the book reflects on the collapse of the organization:

Looking back on that period, we must not be too harsh on our co-ethnics. They paid tribute to the Cold War just as the entire world did at the time and as Romanian society still does today (…) We may well deplore the hostility and the fights which marked relationships among organization members for decades, but we must not judge them too severely. The members of the organization were children of their time and behaved as everyone else around them did on a larger scale. (70)

Romanian churches and organizations were not the only institutions affected by the intrusions of communist politics. According to the majority of my research participants, Romanian embassies and consulates in the United States were heavily populated by Securitate agents before 1989. One of the most prominent Romanian journalists in New York suggested in an interview that the “community was really divided at that time, because there were Securitate officers who lived in the building on 38th Street, at the Consulate and the Embassy.” Later on, he added: “If we were to study the files of Romanian diplomats and ambassadors sent to the U.S., we would realize right away that they were all Securitate agents. Take, for instance, the 1980s: one could never have gotten these positions unless one belonged to the Securitate. It was in the job description” (personal interview, March 12, 2011). Another political refugee from New York recalled: “None of us had the guts to go to the Consulate. Who had the guts to go to the Consulate before 1989? Honestly, none of us did” because, as he explained later, most employees were agents of the regime. Referring to the public rallies Romanian political refugees organized in New York in support of the Romanian revolution of December 1989, he talked at length about the tensions between ordinary Romanian political refugees and the
employees of the Romanian Consulate, which almost resulted in violent conflict. In a particularly eloquent passage, he recalled:

I rode by in my car and then drove up the steps [of the Romanian Consulate building in New York]… yeah, just like that, up the steps, and I caught one of them [a Consulate employee] between the car and the building door. I told him “Listen to me, I could kill you if I pushed the gas pedal.” He said nervously, “Sir, please, look… We’ve put up the flag… we made a hole in it because we support the revolution and the revolutionaries…” (personal interview, June 7, 2011)

Thus, Romanian political refugees felt intense resentment against the Romanian communist regime: not only did it bring about one of the darkest periods in the history of their home country, it also used a “divide and conquer” strategy to control Romanian communities in the West. According to my research participants, the “long arm” of the communist regime reached into their lives in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area and infiltrated churches, ethnic organizations, and institutions founded by the Romanian state on American territory such as embassies and consulates. These intrusions of repressive politics gave rise to suspicion, political accusations, and endless fights, and ultimately led to community fragmentation.

5.6. “Same Stuff Now as in the Past:” Political Intrusions in the NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Area after 1989

Distrust of home country politics is still prevalent today among Romanian immigrants and refugees even though a quarter century has passed since the fall of communism. The vast majority of my research participants, whether they came to the United States before or after 1989, continue being wary of political intrusions. On one hand, most are convinced that Securitate agents sent by the communist regime to infiltrate their

---

1 Romanian revolutionaries back home had cut the party symbol out of the national flag and the hole in the flag became a symbol of the anti-communist revolution.
community never left the U.S. and live among them. On the other hand, Romanian immigrants and refugees consider post-communist Romanian politics a true heir of the former communist regime: in their view, it is corrupt and still capable of meddling with their lives. Communism may have collapsed in the home country but dishonest Romanian politics has not ceased wreaking havoc within the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. Suspicion, political accusations, fights, and dissension are experienced almost as intensely today as they were before 1989.

5.6.1. “They are still around:” Concerns over former Securitate agents’ continued presence in the Romanian émigré community

Romanian immigrants and refugees worry that former Securitate agents sent by the communist regime to infiltrate their community continue to live among them in the United States and are able to cause almost as much harm as they did in the past.

Immigration scholars who have studied Romanians in the U.S. (Costoiu 2009; Gozdziak 1996; Ispa-Landa 2007) report similar findings. For instance, Ispa-Landa states that the Romanian community “appears to have been rent by suspicions that some of their number were involved with the Securitate.” She suggests that these worries persisted long after the collapse of communism in 1989:

In 1995 the St. Louis Dispatch reported that at a dance held to unite the city’s 15,000 Romanian refugees, individuals wondered aloud which of their fellow guests had worked for Securitate. And as late as 2002, the Phoenix New Times reported that parishioners of the Elim Romanian Pentecostal Church accused their pastor of having spied for the Securitate’s Neo-Protestant Cults Department while attending seminary in Romania. (2007, 439)

My research explores these worries in depth. One Romanian immigrant from New York referred as follows to an article she had read in the ethnic media:
It says that there were a lot of spies around here. They permeated the fiber of American society and enjoyed good social status. They did not leave the United States when the Romanian government changed in 1989. They have never been exposed and they are still around. I guess these people are really shady individuals. That’s why many Romanians are suspicious; they are aware of the dirty kind of stuff these guys are capable of doing behind their back. (personal interview, April 14, 2011)

My research participants fear the infamous strategies employed by former Securitate agents to destabilize the Romanian community, e.g., spreading misinformation and false accusations against well-known Romanian exiles, thwarting group initiatives, and creating confusion and discord within churches and ethnic organizations.

Decades after the fall of communism, Romanian churchgoers continue to distrust most priests. When asked whether church infiltration is still an issue nowadays, many suggested that it has slowly diminished but “communist priests” are still around. In 1991 the royal Hohenzollern family, who ruled Romania until the communists forced King Michael to abdicate in 1947, announced its intention to celebrate a wedding in New York and meet with members of the Romanian community. This news triggered heated arguments among Romanian immigrants and refugees. Some suggested that the Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America should conduct the wedding service, while many objected to this proposal due to suspicions of the Archbishop’s collaboration with the former communist regime. As Simona Maria Vrâbiescu Kleckner, a Romanian political refugee and organization leader, notes in her book of memoirs Din exil: Lobby în SUA pentru România. New York: 1990-1998 [From Exile: Lobby for Romania in the United States. New York: 1990-1998],

(…) everyone came up with all kinds of suggestions on this hot topic. The difference of opinion was not due to the size of various churches or their location. It was due to a problem I mentioned earlier, namely the disunity of Romanian churches in the United
States and Canada. People believed that the Archbishop had mostly appointed priests sent by the Romanian Patriarchy in Bucharest rather than priests who saw themselves as members of the émigré community. Thus, many Romanians did not want him to conduct the religious service for the royal wedding. Bratu and Stere wanted priest Victor Runceanu to conduct the service. This was the most difficult issue I had to cope with while organizing the royal visit. Unfortunately, it caused a great deal of tension and many heated arguments. (2006, 89)

Scandals over priests’ political past erupted as late as the 2000s as well. In his article “When Worlds Collide” published in the *New York Times* on September 4, 2005, Ronald Smothers recounts the story of a dispute which took on “a distinctively Old World flavor.” It concerned a Romanian Orthodox priest in New York who had once been highly regarded by his parishioners for spending six years in prison under the Romanian communist regime. However, in 2005 he was locked out of the church and forbidden to hold religious services because several members of the congregation had started questioning his integrity. Many suggested that the priest had only spent two years in prison out of six and was released earlier as a reward for informing on his fellow prisoners. Some wondered how he had managed to get a visa and leave Romania before the fall of communism and argued that such visas were normally given to those who had won favor with the regime. The priest’s supporters, on the other hand, began questioning his accusers and the motives behind their attacks. Rumors went around that it was these parishioners who had, in fact, collaborated with the regime to acquire a desirable social status and be able to leave the country and resettle in the United States. A Romanian professor invited to comment on the dispute stated that he found it “weirdly familiar.” He referred to Nicolae Ceaușescu’s policy of sending priests to the United States to spy on Romanian Orthodox congregations. In his view, all the accusations flying around among
churchgoers were ultimately impossible to prove but people had strong feelings about them because the Cold War was still fresh in their minds.

Romanian organizations are torn apart by similar quarrels. One recent example illustrates this phenomenon well. In July 2011 two dozen Romanians from New York and New Jersey travelled to Canada to meet with their Romanian-Canadian counterparts for an annual ethnic conference organized by the Romanian Cultural Association in the Greater Toronto Area. One of the highlights of the conference was the creation of a Forum for Romanians around the World (FRW). An organization leader from New York was elected executive president of this forum but he was unhappy with the position and started an argument which led to his dismissal. Several founding members of the forum argued that this person “promoted a destructive politics based on selfishness and lies and created disunity within the Council of Administration.” The dispute resulted in a flood of political accusations. The organization leader from New York was denounced as a former agent of the Securitate whose goal was to spread hatred among Romanian immigrants and refugees and undermine community projects. A controversial statement distributed among community members reads as follows:

Ceaușescu signed the Helsinki Accords of 1975 to ingratiate himself with Western powers. As a result, Romania began ‘allowing’ a few thousand citizens per year to leave the country and settle somewhere else in the world. Many resettled in the United States. No one knows what the exact numbers were, but we estimate that about 49 percent were Securitate agents, another 49 percent ordinary criminals released from prison and sent away to invade the West, and perhaps 2 percent honest individuals who decided to leave the country because it no longer offered them a decent living. When one refers to Romanians living in New York, one must automatically think of the neighborhood of Ridgewood, home to tens of thousands of Romanians and teeming with the 49 percent [i.e., with Securitate agents]. This is exactly where our organization leader fits in as well. (personal communication, September 21, 2013)
This dispute had a devastating impact not just on the newly constituted FRW, but also on the Romanian organization in New York whose leader became the target of political attacks. Many members grew suspicious and resentful and left the organization. Two former members of the organization issued an open letter making the following accusations:

The leader of the organization to which we belonged claims that before 1989 he crossed the Romanian border illegally to escape to the United States but was caught and arrested by communist authorities. This story was obviously made up to deceive Romanians abroad. It was in this way that he was infiltrated into the heart of the anti-communist resistance in the United States. This self-proclaimed community leader left communist Romania effortlessly with the blessing of the regime just like a few other relatives of his. (personal communication, September 21, 2013)

The organization leader dismissed these accusations as false but the FRW and his organization in New York were severely weakened and never rebounded.

5.6.2. “A transition from communism to communism:” Experiences of non-democratic post-communist Romanian politics among Romanian immigrants and refugees

Unfortunately, it is not just the politics of the past that wreaks havoc within the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area decades after the fall of communism. Romanian immigrants and refugees see post-communist Romanian politics as a true heir of communism: in their view, it is equally corrupt and capable of meddling with their lives.

The vast majority of my research participants, whether they came to the U.S. before or after 1989, suggested that the Romanian revolution was a coup d’état orchestrated by a faction within the communist party which overturned the regime to grab power for itself. The following story was recounted by a political refugee who came to the United States a few months before the revolution:
And then, nine months later, the revolution broke out and I was lucky because I could immediately go back… I went back to Romania. I was able to go because I had already taken care of all my paperwork here [in the United States], so I could exit and reenter the country. And I went to Romania thinking I might stay there for good, but when I saw what was going on I immediately realized that there really hadn’t been a revolution at all. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)

Despite the fact that he did not have a well-paying job at the time, this political refugee returned to the United States because he was “very upset” about the “stolen revolution” and the political turmoil of post-communist Romania. In her book of memoirs, political refugee Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner describes the hijacking of the Romanian revolution:

What did Romanians living in the U.S. find out about the Romanian revolution during those chaotic days of December 1989? Prime Minister N. Dăscălescu spoke to the crowds from the balcony of the Central Committee and announced that the Ceaușescu couple was no longer in power. Ion Iliescu had taken over political control in Bucharest. Iliescu was a high-rank communist who had studied in Moscow and met Gorbachev. He was loyal to the KGB. His goal was to grab power and keep communist-socialist ideology intact. Unfortunately, Russian influence continued shaping Romania even after the 1989. (2006, 57)

Not only are Romanian immigrants and refugees revolted by the “stolen” Romanian revolution, they also describe Romania’s post-communist trajectory as a failed democratic project. In their view, post-communist Romanian political parties and governments have been dominated by members of the former Communist Party and the Securitate who made every effort to block the country’s transition to democracy for their own benefit. One Romanian political refugee from New York articulated this common view in an interview:

Romania’s post-communist evolution has been very slow, so to say… Don’t forget that it was the four and a half million communists who were guilty of the disaster Romania found itself in in 1989 when the revolution took place. Those people are guilty. Not just one or two, all of them! Because even the janitor of the most low-
profile organization raised his hand and assented to everything [all dictates of the Communist Party]. The same individuals are in power now… the same individuals are in power. This is why there is no progress; this is why Point 8 of the Timişoara Proclamation\(^1\) has not been put into practice. Anyway, you know these things all too well. It is going to be hard. The country needs another twenty years… another forty years [to recover]…

Later on in the interview, this political refugee added:

Don’t forget. The Communist Party was to blame for Romania’s deplorable state before the revolution. And it is the same people who are to blame for the post-communist disaster, but their lack of responsibility is even more outrageous today than it was in the past because they have done everything they could to delay democratization. (personal interview, November 9, 2010)

Romanian immigrants and refugees see most post-communist Romanian presidents as true heirs of the communist regime. As indicated in Chapter Three, Ion Iliescu was the first president of post-communist Romania who stayed in power for ten years: 1990-1996 and 2000-2004. Romanians consider him a corrupt neo-communist who came to power with the support of his former party fellows and the Securitate and thwarted the country’s transition to democracy. Political refugee Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner refers to Iliescu as “the most influential political figure of post-communist Romania who regrouped former communists against the few genuine supporters of the Romanian revolution.” According to her, “he actively supported the mineriads\(^2\) in order to prevent

---

\(^1\) The Timişoara Proclamation was an anti-communist document drafted and adopted in the city of Timişoara in March 1990. Timişoara has acquired symbolic significance in Romanian political culture because the revolution started there in December 1989. Point 8 of the Timişoara Proclamation reads as follows: “As a consequence of the previous point, we propose that electoral law deny former communists and former Securitate officers the right to run for office on any political list and for a period of three consecutive administrations. Their presence in the political life of the country is the main source of the tension and suspicion which trouble Romanian society nowadays. Until the situation is stabilized and national reconciliation is achieved, their absence from public life is absolutely necessary. In addition, we demand that electoral law contain a special paragraph denying former communists the right to run for president of the country. The president of Romania must be one of the symbols of our break with communism.” This proclamation ultimately failed to shape Romanian electoral legislation.

\(^2\) The term “mineriad” refers to the four violent interventions of Romanian miners in Bucharest during the early 1990s. Ion Iliescu’s first year in office saw the eruption of massive anti-government demonstrations.
the rise of Romania’s historical political parties, slowed down the democratization of state institutions, and maintained the former Securitate under a different name (2006, 18-9). At the end of her book, Vrăbiescu Kleckner sums up Iliescu’s influence on Romania’s post-communist destiny:

It was impossible to carry out the necessary reforms under Ion Iliescu’s administration. He was deeply shaped by his Muscovite past and extreme left views. He wanted to maintain the old ideology and was convinced that single-party democracy would work. In response to the need for socio-economic reform, he devised a middle way between capitalism and socialism, between pluralism and dictatorship, between planned economy and market economy. Thus, he obstructed Romania’s democratic transition causing the economy to come to a standstill. As a result, citizens sank into poverty and Iliescu stayed in power. His regime is responsible for a much delayed political and economic transition which can only be described as a historical transition from communism to communism! This was a bad and counterproductive form of government and it wasted citizens’ time. (399)

Traian Băsescu was the other president of post-communist Romania who stayed in power for ten years: 2004-2014. During his two administrations, Băsescu steered the country in a more democratic direction than Iliescu despite numerous political crises: he publicly denounced the communist regime, promoted freedom of the press, reformed the judiciary, and oversaw Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007. Nevertheless, Romanian immigrants and refugees see his rule in light of its continuity with the former communist regime rather than its progress toward democracy. Most of them talked about Băsescu’s past. He used to be a ship captain in the 1980s. Since this position involved a great deal of travelling abroad and managing large numbers of employees, it required intense collaboration with the Securitate. In a statement published in the Romanian
newspaper *Telegraf* [Telegraph] on April 8, 1992, Băsescu acknowledged that he had provided information reports to the *Securitate*. However, his file has not been found and it is impossible to tell how closely he collaborated with the *Securitate* before 1989. A famous Romanian journalist from New York who came to the United States as a political refugee stated:

"This is the rottenness of it all. The rotten political system created under communism is alive and well in contemporary Romania and impossible to tear down. Same stuff now as in the past. Most Romanian politicians are former communists. Do you want to know who they are? Take Traian Băsescu for example: he used to be a *Securitate* informer. Everybody knows him! Then, of course, there is Adrian Năstase,¹ Ion Iliescu, everybody really. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)"

According to Romanian immigrants and refugees, an exception was President Emil Constantinescu (1996-2000) whom they see as well-intentioned and pro-democratic but ultimately weak and unable to dismantle the dense power network of the former nomenklatura and the *Securitate*. Indeed, Constantinescu’s administration came after Iliescu’s six years in office and ended with Iliescu’s reelection as president for another four years. In her book of memoirs, political refugee Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner articulates her disappointment with the Constantinescu administration as follows:

"As time went by, I realized that there were fewer and fewer chances that Romania would eventually meet Western standards. The presidential elections of 1996 could have been a good opportunity. But despite its unequivocally pro-Western foreign policy, President Emil Constantinescu’s administration (1996-2000) did not bring about genuine internal change. What is more, Constantinescu’s political withdrawal four months before the presidential elections of 2000 practically handed the presidency back to Ion Iliescu who was supported by his corrupt party (…) I was very

¹ Adrian Năstase is a Romanian politician who served as Prime Minister under President Ion Iliescu between 2000 and 2004. He competed in the 2004 presidential election as the candidate of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) but lost to Traian Băsescu, leader of the Democratic Party (PD) and candidate of the Justice and Truth Alliance (DA). Năstase is currently serving a four-year sentence in prison for bribery and blackmail."
disappointed when Iliescu came back to power and continued his neo-communist politics. (2006, 399-400)

Not only do Romanian immigrants and refugees view post-communist Romanian politics as corrupt, they also argue that civil society has little chance of standing up to the former members of the nomenklatura and the Securitate. One political refugee from New York articulated this common view in an interview:

Every organization in Romania… let’s say someone founded an organization—well, it would run up against the wall of the second and third generation of ex-communists. Don’t forget: now it is the generation of Iliescu and Băsescu; it’s these guys who rule the country… but then later on it’s going to be their children and their grandchildren who will be looking to take advantage of Romania. (personal interview, November 9, 2010)

In short, Romanian immigrants and refugees, whether they arrived in the United States before or after 1989, circulate a pessimistic view of the civic and political life of post-communist Romania. They tell stories about former communists and members of the Securitate making their way to the top tiers of Romanian politics only to spread lies and engage in bribery, nepotism, theft, fraud, and electoral manipulation.

Moreover, the corrupt politics of post-communist Romania is seen as permeating Romanian churches, organizations, embassies, and consulates in the United States. As I noted during fieldwork and interviews, many of my research participants worry that Romanian Orthodox priests serving émigré communities work hand in hand with dishonest politicians in Bucharest. For instance, one Romanian political refugee told the story of a recent scandal involving a Romanian Orthodox priest from New Jersey. He suggested that the priest was probably “paid by a powerful Romanian politician to cause divisions within the community” (field session, February 22, 2011). While this person did
not clarify why Romanian politicians would need priests to divide the Romanian community in New Jersey, many other research participants pointed to lack of electoral support as a possible reason. Most Romanian politicians (particularly those closely associated with the former communist regime) know that they are radically unpopular among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States and therefore stand little chance of getting their votes in presidential elections. This is important because the Romanian diaspora has had a decisive influence on the results of recent presidential elections. For instance, in 2009 the diaspora helped elect Traian Băsescu to a second term in office. Băsescu ran against Mircea Geoană and won by a very small margin with almost 80 percent of the votes from abroad. My research participants perceive Băsescu as a former member of the Communist Party and a Securitate informer. They normally resent him but in 2009 they saw him as less dangerous than Geoană, candidate of a party alliance which included the Social Democratic Party (PSD). PSD is largely seen as Ion Iliescu’s party or the party of the former nomenklatura and the Securitate. Thus, Romanian immigrants and refugees voted for Băsescu in large numbers to prevent Geoană and his neo-communist clique from coming back to power. Given the influence of the diaspora on presidential elections, most of my research participants are convinced that corrupt Romanian politicians have devised strategies to prevent massive voter turnout abroad, including working with priests to divide émigré communities, reducing the number of polling stations, and refusing to introduce the online vote to facilitate ballot casting.
Not only do Romanian immigrants and refugees see Romanian Orthodox churches as affected by the corrupt politics of post-communist Romania, they claim that Romanian organizations experience similar problems. During fieldwork and interviews, I heard numerous stories about organization leaders having connections with dishonest politicians in Bucharest. This generates distrust among Romanian émigrés and many refrain from joining their organizations. Political refugee Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner offers a relevant example. Before 1989 a Romanian organization leader was suspected of collaboration with the Ceauşescu regime. After 1989 he became loyal to President Ion Iliescu whom most Romanian immigrants and refugees hold responsible for Romania’s struggle with neo-communism and stalled transition to democracy. This person of dubious reputation founded a ghost organization called The Congress of Romanian Americans (CORA) which claimed to represent 85 percent of Romanian Americans but in fact had no support within the Romanian émigré community. The newspaper *Lumea Liberă Românească* [Free Romanian World] confirmed that this organization was an agency of the Romanian government which worked hand in hand with the Romanian Embassy in Washington to promote the Iliescu regime. (2006, 293)

Such stories are common among my research participants in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. A Romanian immigrant and organization leader who settled in New York after 1989 recalled a similar case. He talked about another Romanian organization leader from New York who is “interesting, but unable to draw people to his organization. His organization has no representation at the community level; it only has a couple dozen members. His godfathers are the Păunescu brothers so he’s got his back covered. As a person, he is very cunning and self-interested” (field session, September 7, 2010). To put this comment in context, the Păunescu brothers are known for their collaboration with the
communist regime and the *Securitate*. After 1989 they used their former connections with the nomenklatura to buy political favors (particularly with Presidents Ion Iliescu and Traian Băsescu) and secure trade advantages. As a result, they accumulated wealth and became successful businessmen and dollar multi-millionaires (see, for instance, Brucan 1998, 88; Gallagher 2005, 118). Corrupt politics meets dirty business in these public figures. Hence, the New York organization leader associated with them is seen as a shady and untrustworthy individual. On the other hand, the Romanian immigrant and organization leader who told this corruption story has also been accused of connections with Dan Voiculescu, one of the most venal businessmen and politicians in Bucharest. Before 1989 Voiculescu collaborated with the *Securitate*. After 1989 he became a successful businessmen, owner of several media outlets, and founder of the Romanian Humanist Party (PUR), later renamed the Conservative Party (PC), which supported the Social Democratic Party (PSD) during the parliamentary and presidential elections of 2004 (Gallagher 2005, 252). As indicated above, PSD is largely seen as the party of Ion Iliescu and the former nomenklatura and the *Securitate*. Voiculescu has recently been sentenced to ten years in prison for money laundering. Such stories about Romanian organization leaders abound among Romanian immigrants and refugees and cause suspicion and heated arguments.

But perhaps the political figures Romanian émigrés resent the most are their representatives in the Romanian Parliament. Representatives of the Romanian diaspora are seen as promoting the interests of the Romanian political parties to which they belong and their party bosses rather than the needs of expatriates. In an article titled “Alegerile
published in Cotidianul [Daily News] on July 8, 2012, Grigore Culian, one of the most famous and respected Romanian journalists in New York, makes several accusations against Mircea Lubanovici, current representative of the Romanian diaspora in the Romanian Parliament. Among other things, Culian states that in 2008 Lubanovici worked hand in hand with corrupt leaders of the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL) to manipulate the Romanian community in the United States and obtain their votes. He suggests that PDL hastily opened a branch in Chicago right before election time without registering it with the U.S. Department of State as required by American law. Realizing that this move was illegal, PDL leaders in Bucharest closed down the Chicago branch and asked Lubanovici to be their candidate because he had some influence among Penticostal Romanians on the West Coast. According to Culian, Lubanovici acquired his seat in the Romanian Parliament by mobilizing Penticostal Romanians to vote at polling stations set up in their own churches. This strategy caused fights, struggles, and wide divisions among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the United States. Many felt that the campaign was rushed and driven by party interests in Bucharest rather than the needs of émigré communities.

Moreover, Culian accuses Lubanovici of ignoring his bill proposal concerning the candidates for diaspora seats in the Romanian Parliament. According to Culian, diaspora candidates, whether they belong to Romanian political parties or not, should gather a number of signatures from Romanian émigré communities to prove that they have won
their support. Currently, the lack of such a requirement puts independent candidates unaffiliated with Romanian political parties at a disadvantage: unlike party candidates, independent candidates enjoy the support of their communities in the United States but lose elections due to ineffective campaigns because they do not have the money and resources available to Romanian political parties. In the journalist’s own words, “When independent candidates, our legitimate representatives, benefit from equal conditions as party candidates, your seat in parliament will crumble, Deputy Lubanovici. Then, we Romanian-Americans will finally have genuine representatives instead of the puppets who now sit in parliament just for show.”

Of course, Lubanovici has denied these accusations in an attempt to demonstrate that he is a worthwhile representative of the Romanian community in the United States. In a public message titled “Motive pentru a continua împreună” [Reasons to Continue Working Together] published on his personal website on December 6, 2012, Lubanovici states that despite his affiliation with PDL he has never used politics to make money or promote his private interests: “In all my actions, I have demonstrated stability and an immense desire to continue legislative reform in Romania for the benefit of all Romanians at home and abroad. I have never accepted any offers to play dirty political games in parliament and I have not become a political opportunist.” Nevertheless, the distrust, arguments, and community divisions generated by his political affiliation continue to mar his image among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.
Besides Romanian churches and organizations in the United States and diaspora seats in the Romanian Parliament, the negative influence of Romanian politics also manifests itself in Romanian embassies and consulates. Most Romanian immigrants and refugees distrust the Romanian Consulate in New York and believe that its top employees have been appointed by dishonest politicians in Bucharest. One Romanian interviewee stated that Romanian officials in the U.S. are “as corrupt as they were during communism.” Then, he suggested that today’s Romanian officials are “even more corrupt than they were under Ceaușescu.” According to him, they only care about petty personal interests and never engage in dialogue with the Romanian émigré community. For instance, nobody showed up at the ceremony organized by President Barack Obama in honor of the first Romanian graduate of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. The interviewee recalled that the “Romanian flag waved behind President Obama” but none of the Romanian officials were there to congratulate their co-national despite the fact that letters of invitation had been sent to the Romanian Consulate. He expressed disgust with such events and emphasized the need to fight against “old mentalities” fueled by the “red rottenness originating in the Kremlin” (personal interview, May 21, 2011).

5.7. Witnessing American Foreign Policy before and after 1989: Ambiguity and Harm

Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area do not talk as much about American politics as they do about communist and post-communist Romanian politics. During fieldwork and interviews, I noted that this was partly due to their traumatic experiences of home country politics. As indicated in Chapter Two, most of the leaders and members of Romanian churches and organizations in the NY-NJ-PA
metropolitan area are middle-aged and elderly Romanians who lived under communism well into their mature years. They came to the United States in two different waves: about half left Romania before or immediately after 1989 and acquired the status of political refugees in the United States, while the other half left Romania after 1989 and came to the United States as immigrants. Prior to migration, these people experienced Romanian politics painfully and intensely. Some only experienced communism while others experienced both communism and post-communism, but all have vivid memories of the fear, pain, frustration, resentment, and anger that home country politics caused them and their families and friends. Once Romanian immigrants and refugees resettled in the United States, they continued feeling the effects of home country politics mostly in the form of political intrusions which have caused arguments and divisions within their ethnic community. Thus, their interest in Romanian politics has not dwindled. On the contrary, it remains as keen and bothersome as it was back home, and often precludes a new engagement with American politics.

Another reason my research participants talked about Romanian politics more than American politics may have been my own ethnic background as a researcher. Since I myself am Romanian, they largely drew upon what they assumed to be common knowledge and experience. Discussions often contained phrases such as “as you well know,” “we both know that,” “you know all too well that,” and others along the same lines. Our shared ethnic background facilitated relationships and conversations which often lasted beyond the time frame agreed upon initially. However, this also meant that my research participants were less inclined to talk about American politics. When I asked
specific questions about their experience and views of American politics, they usually answered but the conversation soon drifted back to Romanian politics.

Nevertheless, Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area did have thoughts to share about American politics. They are mostly interested in U.S. foreign policy toward Romania, Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet bloc. The vast majority of Romanian political refugees are grateful to the United States for its Cold War foreign policy and for the opportunity to start a new life away from one of the most oppressive communist governments in Eastern Europe. This new life often began in the Western European refugee camps where people who had just escaped from the Soviet bloc sought shelter and felt protected. Indeed, the refugee camps were a recurrent topic of conversation during fieldwork and interviews. One Romanian political refugee described in detail and with much admiration and appreciation the visit paid by an American delegation to the Austrian refugee camp at Traiskirchen where he had spent several months before making it to the United States. According to him, the United States supported the camps financially and American delegates went to great lengths to ensure that refugees received the care they needed prior to resettlement:

At one point, a delegation of Americans came to Traiskirchen. You see, the refugee camps at Traiskirchen (Austria), Nuremberg (Germany), and Latina (Italy) were financially supported by the United States and there had been complaints: some said the refugees weren’t getting clothes and other necessary items because the camp administrators were stealing goods and selling them on the black market. So the American delegation came to assess the situation and interviewed me. I told them, “Well, this is just not true.” I had asked for a leather jacket and I got it. I had also received pocket money and everything else I needed. It wasn’t true that the refugees weren’t given life necessities. I for one had received a good winter coat, a jacket, and other clothes—everything I needed, really. A committee distributed the goods and they gave me things for myself, my wife, and my daughter. They gave us all we needed. But the point is, the Americans were really concerned about our welfare and
determined to check what was going on in the refugee camps. From Traiskirchen, they went on to Nuremberg (Germany) and Latina (Italy) in order to investigate and see if the money donated by the American people had reached its destination and fulfilled its purpose. (personal interview June 7, 2011)

Also, the Romanian political refugees with whom I discussed during fieldwork and interviews spoke with gratitude about the quick and smooth the process of obtaining permanent residence in the United States. One Romanian political refugee who escaped Romania several months before the revolution stated:

When I landed at JFK [John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York], I requested political asylum right then and there. The whole thing took about six hours. It was an easy case because I was a musician and I had not been affiliated with any political party. I mean, I had not been affiliated with the Romanian Communist Party because there were no other political parties in Romania at the time. All musicians and visual artists were freelancers. I told the American authorities that I had been earning enough money in my home country and I could even travel abroad from time to time, so I was doing quite well. The reason I requested political asylum was cultural persecution: I could not express myself freely in my art. They approved my file immediately right there at the airport and gave me a Green Card. Then I went out into the city and started working all kinds of jobs: taxi driver, school bus driver, waiter, whatever people do to survive around here. (personal interview March 12, 2011)

Romanian political refugees acknowledge the difficulties they went through once they became permanent residents of the United States and began a new life in an unfamiliar society, particularly since the Romanian community did not do much to help them integrate. Many recalled struggling with English while working menial jobs to support themselves and their families. Nonetheless, within months of their arrival the majority of Romanian political refugees learned English well enough to communicate, moved on to better jobs, and started earning decent wages. They are grateful to the U.S. for its policy of bringing in Eastern European refugees during the Cold War and take pride in being able to give back to their host country. One Romanian political refugee said:
Here in America I have spent the last twenty-five years of my life working for a blood bank. In 2003 I was made Driver of the Year by the U.S. Health Department. They gave me a medal and a diploma, and mentioned my name in medical journals because I contribute to saving thousands of lives. I have been to over three hundred hospitals and I know exactly what floors I need to take the donated blood to. I use my knowledge to get there in time. I work nights, weekends, holidays. This year I even worked on Easter. I drove to a hospital in Pennsylvania because there was a child in a coma who needed type 0 blood, and when I got there the doctor was waiting for me to give him the bottles. I got back home on Easter morning. I had been gone all night. The medal and the diploma were a sign of appreciation for my work. I am just happy I have done my duty to this country and saved thousands of people. It is truly an accomplishment I am proud of. (personal interview June 7, 2011)

Romanian immigrants who came to the United States after 1989 are equally grateful to their host country for the opportunity to begin a new life away from the chaos of post-communist Romania. The Romanian immigrants I encountered during fieldwork and interviews pointed out that since the fall of communism it has been more difficult for Romanians to acquire permanent residence in the United States. Nevertheless, most of my research participants have managed to become U.S. permanent residents and citizens and are proud of their status. The vast majority intend to live the rest of their lives in the United States. One Romanian immigrant I met during fieldwork won the Visa Lottery and resettled in the U.S. in 2005 together with his wife and daughter. In the beginning, the family had a difficult time getting used to an entirely different lifestyle, particularly since they did not receive much support from the Romanian community. However, over time both the man and his wife found good jobs and started earning decent wages while their daughter grew proficient in English and adjusted to the American system of education. This Romanian immigrant gave me the following advice:

Do everything you can to stay in the United States because it is so worth it. I learn something new every day and it is all so different from the life I left behind in Romania. Romanian politics is just rotten. I don’t even care about it any more.
Politicians are all the same over there regardless of the political party they belong to. They have pushed the country into the abyss. (field session, February 22, 2011)

He proceeded to tell me about entire industries developed during the Ceaușescu era and forced into bankruptcy by Romanian politicians who later bought them for little money and resold them at much higher prices to make a profit.

Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area see American politics as more democratic than Romanian politics. To them, this means primarily that unlike Romanian politics, American politics is less corrupt and non-intrusive; it does not force itself on citizen lives or on democratic institutions such as the press. My research participants have never been put under pressure by American politicians aiming to acquire power to promote their own interests rather than serve the needs of their constituencies. According to them, American candidates running for political office declare their goals openly, conduct transparent negotiations with voters to gain electoral support, and accept disagreement or different political options without attempting to impose their own point of view. A famous Romanian journalist from New York articulated this view eloquently during our interview:

I have never—and I give daily thanks to God for the opportunity to live in this country [the United States]—I have never experienced any kind of political pressure regarding what I should or should not publish in my newspaper. They [Americans] have a different understanding of independent newspapers. It is ethical to criticize those in power because they are the only ones who commit abuse. They have the power to commit abuse, so one has to take a stand. The moment you become obedient, you are no longer a journalist; you have become something else. You are getting paid to look the other way and ignore the truth. I have been really tough from this point of view. I am critical; it’s always been a battle of arguments for me. From this point of view, I am lucky to live in this country. Issues between politicians and the press are addressed openly and elegantly. Actually, there are no “issues” between politicians and the press. They [politicians] invite you to discuss. Instead of putting pressure on you or slashing your car tires and the like, they invite you to discuss—not in order to force their
beliefs on you but to understand your point of view. These discussions are usually positive. Either they come up with convincing arguments and you accept them if you are honest enough to admit their validity, or you bring up some really good points and end up convincing them. It is a battle of arguments unfolding in a civilized, professional way and that’s all there is to it. That is why I am really lucky to live in this country. In Romania, interactions between politicians and the press are very different: journalists get fired from their jobs if they don’t take orders from politicians and their wives might also be left unemployed; or they are bought up because they are so desperate to feed their families that they accept compromises and become obedient—they agree to serve politicians.

Romanian immigrants and refugees also see American politics as closer to the grassroots than Romanian politics. As the Romanian journalist from New York explained, Romanian politicians want to seize power through any means (including fraud) in order to enjoy its advantages and increase their influence and wealth. By contrast, young Americans aspiring to become politicians study hard, run for office in a small district of a few thousand people or work in the public sector for several years, and then run for a senate seat in their own state. Only when they have gained enough experience, earned the trust of their constituencies, and acquired political maturity do they run for a seat in the U.S. Senate or the Executive Office of the President. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)

In his view, American politicians start their career at the local level and prove their worth over time before making it to the top tiers of politics.

However, Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area also see a less appealing side of American politics. In their view, foreign relations between the United States and Romania have often been naïve and ambiguous or even hypocritical and destructive. For instance, Romanian immigrants and refugees condemn the Yalta Conference held at the end of World War II. Many of my research participants suggested that at Yalta the heads of state of the United States (Franklin D. Roosevelt), the United Kingdom (Winston Churchill), and the Soviet Union (Joseph Stalin) divided
Europe into spheres of influence and allowed Eastern and Central Europe to fall under Soviet control. During fieldwork, several leaders and members of Romanian organizations in New York advised me to read the book of memoirs written by political refugee Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner in order to acquire a good understanding of Romanian émigrés’ views of the Yalta Conference. Many Romanian immigrants and refugees were familiar with this book and suggested that it articulates well their own thoughts about international relations, particularly American foreign policy toward Romania before and after 1989. Indeed, the book was displayed at various community events together with *New York Magazin*, the most widely read newspaper of the Romanian community in New York. Referring to the Yalta Conference, Vrăbiescu Kleckner states:

> The disastrous situation generated by the Yalta Conference constituted the legal foundation for Soviet imperialism and drew a stark boundary between the free zone of Western Europe and the Soviet-dominated countries of Eastern and Central Europe. No one denounced this decision until 2005 when President George W. Bush had the courage to do so for the first time in history. He openly called the outcome of the Yalta Conference a most unfortunate solution.

Indeed, Romania was subjected to the worst communist regime in the region.

Communism in Romania did not grow from local roots. It was introduced by “a handful of persons brought over in military uniforms from the Soviet Union and instructed to organize communist groups under cover” (2006, 56).

Romanian immigrants and refugees also question the U.S. decision to treat Romania’s communist president Nicolae Ceaușescu as the maverick of the Soviet bloc. During the 1960s and the 1970s, the U.S. paid special attention to Romania because it saw Ceaușescu as a liberal and independent head of state who was willing to stand up to the
Soviet Union. The aim of the U.S. was to weaken Soviet control in the region by encouraging acts of dissidence. Indeed, in 1968 Ceaușescu had denounced the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and condemned military violations of national sovereignty thereby distancing himself from Soviet foreign policy within the Eastern bloc (Petrescu 2007; Petrescu 2013). In 1975 Romania participated in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Helsinki, Finland together with the U.S., Canada, the Soviet Union, as well as most European states except Albania. The U.S. hoped that this conference would be a step toward lessening Cold War tensions between the West and the East. Ceaușescu signed the Helsinki Accords and emphasized the importance of national sovereignty and his commitment to the protection of human rights. These strategic moves won him favor with the United States and the rest of the Western world (Petrescu 2013). As a result, U.S. Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford paid friendly visits to communist Romania and a trade agreement between the United States and Romania was signed in 1975 granting Romania “Most Favored Nation” status. Moreover, Ceaușescu and his wife were invited to the United States on several occasions and greeted warmly by the U.S. presidents who received them. In April 1978 President Jimmy Carter opened his welcoming speech in honor of the Ceaușescu couple as follows:

This morning the people of the United States are honored by having as our guest a great leader of a great country. President Ceaușescu comes here from Romania with his wife, Elena, and it is a great personal pleasure for me on behalf of our country to welcome them. This is the fourth visit by President Ceaușescu to the United States, and my predecessors have honored themselves by visiting the nation of Romania.

It’s accurate to say that in the last ten years or more, the friendly relationships between the United States and Romania have increased and improved rapidly to the satisfaction and to the benefit of our people.
Trade between our two countries in the last ten years has been multiplied ten times over. And because of the rapidly improving relations that still exist, we expect the volume of trade to more than double in the next three years.

It’s also of great benefit to me as President to have a chance to consult with a national and an international leader like our guest today. Their influence as Romanian leaders throughout the international world is exceptional. Because of the strong commitments of the President and the independence of the people, Romania has been able to serve as a bridge among nations with highly divergent views and interests and among leaders who would find it difficult under some circumstances to negotiate directly with each other. (1978, 734-5)

Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area have been disappointed by American foreign policy toward Ceaușescu’s Romania. Dumitru Cărstea, a Romanian political refugee who spent part of his life in Pennsylvania, articulates his regret at President Carter’s decision to invite Ceaușescu to the White House in his book of memoirs Strategies for Happiness, Success, and Liberty. Life in the Promised Land—U.S.A.—What a Country!:

The Carter administration made several blunders and appeared weak in leading this country [the United States] and soft on the communist countries. When Carter met with the bloody dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, he praised him. Ceaușescu kept saying, ‘Oh, is he talking about me? Is he talking about me? Tell me more and smile.’ This type of attitude was not acceptable to those of us who were hoping for the liberation of our enslaved and suffering compatriots. (2010, 339)

Most Romanian immigrants and refugees see the U.S. strategy of offering special treatment to Ceaușescu’s Romania as a sign of naiveté and lack of information at best and as an act of dishonesty and hypocrisy at worst. Nicholas Dima, another Romanian political refugee who lived in New York and New Jersey prior to moving to Washington, D.C., comments on American foreign policy toward Romania in his book of memoirs Journey to Freedom. He starts out by suggesting that the United States was deceived by Ceaușescu’s devious strategies:
In the end the decision to extend “Most Favored Nation” status was obviously political, but with every hearing [i.e., every annual U.S. congressional hearing for the renewal of Romania’s “Most Favored Nation” status] it was more and more evident that Ceaușescu’s regime was one of the most Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. Even so, however, the picture was somehow distorted. Many active Congressmen or witnesses did not see the catastrophic tragedy of the entire Romanian people (...).

In the spring of 1985 David Funderburk, the American ambassador to Bucharest, resigned and fully confirmed the worst case scenario for Romania. Ceaușescu’s independence was a hoax. America was cheated and deceived. Human rights were grossly violated. The Romanian people were cruelly suppressed. Ceaușescu and his men were abusing the country, subjecting Romania to a slow death. There was no hope and no future. (Dima 1989, 344)

Dima’s account moves from deploring the United States’ weakness in allowing itself to be deceived by Ceaușescu’s alleged “independence” to blaming the United States for deliberately ignoring the plight of Romanians under the Ceaușescu regime:

What a shame that a leading American congressman who visited Romania in 1983 declared, after meeting Ceaușescu, that the entire Romanian nation was behind Ceaușescu’s policies. He “knew it” by talking to the Romanian president. Later the well-known American journalist, Jack Anderson, published something similar in the Washington Post, claiming that he knew it from a “very reliable source.” How preposterous! (346)

Whether Romanian political refugees were merely disappointed by the U.S. foreign policy toward communist Romania or openly condemned it for disregarding the oppression of Romanian citizens by a ruthless dictator, they reacted strongly to Ceaușescu’s visit to the United States during the Carter administration. In April 1978 hundreds of Romanian political refugees organized a street protest in front of the Waldorf Astoria hotel where Ceaușescu and his wife spent a few days while visiting the city. The protesters gathered in front of the hotel before the Ceaușescu couple arrived. They threw eggs and tomatoes at the limousine, displayed signs reading “Ceaușescu—Idi Amin” and “Ceaușescu—Dracula,” booed, and chanted “Ceaușescu—killer! Ceaușescu—criminal!”
The protests continued throughout Ceaușescu’s stay in New York (Pacepa 1987, 317-39). This was one of the few times the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area gathered together to organize a series of street demonstrations. Of course, the popularity of Ceaușescu’s Romania in the United States declined steeply in the mid-1980s when the country’s violations of human rights became increasingly clear (Deletant 1995, 204-10; Pilon 1985, 7-8). In 1988 Ceaușescu renounced Romania’s “Most Favored Nation” status because he knew that the United States would not renew it (Goldman 1997).

After the fall of communism, Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area identified other problematic aspects of American politics. In their view, the United States was too quick to celebrate the end of the Cold War and consider Eastern and Central European countries liberated from communism. As indicated above, during fieldwork, leaders and members of Romanian organizations in New York recommended the book of memoirs written by Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner as an essential read for anyone who wanted to learn about Romanian émigrés’ views of American foreign policy before and after 1989. Vrăbiescu Kleckner states that once communism collapsed, the U.S. cut financial support for two radio stations (Radio Free Europe and Voice of America) which had played an essential role in promoting democratic values to people in the Soviet bloc. The U.S. also stopped supporting the free press and democratic opposition parties in Eastern and Central Europe. These moves slowed down reforms in the newly liberated countries and Romania fared worst among them as it evolved from communism to neo-communism (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 48-50). As Vrăbiescu
Kleckner puts it, “the West underestimated the unfortunate effects of communism. Whoever knew the least bit about the Soviet world realized that no magic could erase fifty years of communist domination and the mentality and behavior associated with it” (49-50).

Romanian immigrants and refugees also questioned the U.S. Congress initiative to grant post-communist Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status a few months before the Romanian presidential elections of 1996. The incumbent President Ion Iliescu was seen as a member of the former nomenklatura who had hijacked the Romanian revolution with the help of his party fellows and the Securitate and blocked the country’s transition to democracy. In 1996 Iliescu ran against democratic challenger Emil Constantinescu. For the first time in six years, there was hope that neo-communism would be defeated and Romania would finally embark on a path to democracy. In this context, a Romanian political committee from New York\(^1\) advised the U.S. Congress not to grant Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status before the elections in order to prevent Iliescu from using the clause to his advantage during the presidential campaign. However, Congress voted against this suggestion and granted Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status. As foreseen, Iliescu presented it as an achievement of his administration. He also accused the opposition and its émigré supporters of lack of patriotism because they had tried to prevent Congress from granting Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status. Iliescu lost the 1996 presidential elections, but the U.S. Congress vote was a disappointment to many Romanian

\(^{1}\) This political committee was called Ad Hoc Committee for the Organization of Romanian Democracy (ACORD). It had eight members and operated between 1991 and 1998. Its goal was lobbying for Romania’s transition to democracy.
immigrants and refugees. They saw it as a decision grounded in economic considerations rather than a genuine concern for democratic progress in a country troubled by the legacy of communism (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 285-304).

Thus, on one hand, Romanian immigrants and refugees argue that the U.S. offered too much support to communist Romania because it mistook Nicolae Ceaușescu for a liberal and independent head of state willing to stand up to the Soviet Union and cooperate with the West. Of course, this policy neglected the fact that Ceaușescu was one of the most repressive dictators of the former Soviet bloc. On the other hand, Romanian immigrants and refugees argue that the U.S. offered too little support to post-communist Romania and its incipient democratic institutions because it assumed that the country was already set on a path to democracy. In fact, after the revolution the country devolved from communism to neo-communism and reforms progressed slowly.

5.8. Similar Experiences and Understandings of Romanian and American Politics among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees

As specified in Chapter Two, there are two groups of Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area: one group left Romania before or immediately after 1989 and acquired the status of political refugees in the United States, while the other group left Romania after 1989 and came to the United States as immigrants. How do these two groups of Romanians fare with respect to experiences and understandings of politics? Do Romanians who lived through the collapse of communism and a period of democratic transition at home relate differently to the world of politics compared to Romanian political refugees who fled during political repression? Have they had more positive
experiences of politics? Have they developed more hopeful understandings of politics? Are we seeing signs of improvement?

Most of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly Romanians who lived under communism well into their mature years. My fieldwork and interviews did not reveal any significant differences between these two groups’ experiences and understandings of politics. Most Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants felt the tight grip of the Romanian communist regime and the disastrous effects of Romanian post-communist governments. The “long arm” of non-democratic Romanian politics followed them as they resettled in the United States and brought about dissension in their ethnic community. As to American politics, both Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants have been at least partly disappointed by it, particularly by U.S. foreign relations with their home country before and after 1989. Thus, they have developed a negative view of politics and remain wary of top-down political intrusions in their lives.

This finding may be due to the fact that for the most part, my research participants spent large sections of their lives under communism regardless of whether they came to the United States before or after 1989. Young Romanians in their late twenties and early thirties lived under communism for just a few years and left the country in early adulthood. These individuals rarely join Romanian churches and organizations. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether they have had better experiences of politics or have developed more positive understandings of politics. The three young Romanians I was able to find through Romanian student associations and interview were not very different
from older Romanians. They were deeply disappointed by post-communist Romanian politics and one of them saw monarchy as the only solution to the widespread corruption of the political system. Of course, no definite statements can be made about young Romanian immigrants based on these three interviews. What is certain is that young Romanian immigrants do not participate in the life of the ethnic community. Whether they participate in mainstream civic organizations or have “individualized” and are mostly concerned with their own careers and material success (as some of the older Romanian immigrants and refugees suggested) remains to be seen. The experiences and views of politics of young Romanians would be an interesting research topic for a future study.

5.9. Conclusion

Chapter Five has explored the ways in which Romanian immigrants and refugees make sense of their fragmented community. Briefly put, they see communist and post-communist Romanian politics as intrusive and destructive of community ties. Section 5.2 presented several accounts of community fragmentation advanced by Romanian immigrants and refugees. Of these, stories of communist and post-communist Romanian politics reaching beyond home country borders and invading the Romanian émigré community in the United States are the most prevalent. This is a surprising finding. Scholars normally assume that immigration from repressive countries brings about a stark break in political experience: people are expected to escape political repression when they leave their non-democratic home country behind and become free to participate in the politics of their new democratic host country. However, my research shows that
Romanian immigrants and refugees continued struggling with political repression even as they resettled in the United States. This was particularly the case during the Cold War but went on after the collapse of communism as well. Sections 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5 presented Romanian immigrants and refugees’ traumatic experiences of communist repression in the home country and traced the ways it continued shaping their lives in Western refugee camps and the United States. Constant struggles against political intrusions in churches, organizations, and institutions founded by the Romanian state on American territory led to mutual suspicion, political accusations, arguments, and disunity. Section 5.6 explored Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences of post-communist Romanian politics, which they see as equally intrusive and destructive of community ties. Section 5.7 shifted to American politics: it showed that Romanian immigrants and refugees have had ambiguous experiences of American politics. They see it as more democratic than Romanian politics but also as partly hypocritical and harmful. Section 5.8 explained that Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants do not differ much in their negative experiences and understandings of politics. The next chapter of the dissertation will discuss Romanian immigrants and refugees’ political withdrawal as a result of their negative experiences and understandings of home and host country politics.
Chapter Six

“We Don’t Do Politics Here…”
Political Withdrawal and Political Independence as Strategies of Coping with Contentious Politics

Motto: “Personally, I believed firmly in America, but with the passage of time, I grew stronger and more mature, I turned more and more toward God, and eventually I found a deeper meaning in life, far above daily politics.”
Nicholas Dima, Journey to Freedom, 58

6.1. Chapter Overview and Purpose

Chapter Six shows how Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences and understandings of politics have led to low levels of political engagement in the United States. Section 6.2 reviews their traumatic experiences of communist and post-communist Romanian politics in the home and host countries and their disappointment with American politics. It concludes with a brief discussion of Romanian immigrants and refugees’ view of politics as contentious. Section 6.3 explores the most common strategy adopted by Romanian community leaders in response to contentious politics: political withdrawal. Section 6.4 focuses on a different and much rarer strategy of coping with contentious politics adopted by a few Romanian community leaders: political engagement from an independent position. Section 6.5 explains that with very few exceptions, Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants tend to withdraw from politics.

1 In Political Science, the term “contentious politics” normally refers to protest politics (see, for instance, Ekiert and Kubik 1998). However, in this dissertation the term “contentious politics” is used differently: it refers to politics as an area of human activity that is likely to cause arguments and disunity.
6.2. Contentious Politics: A Review of Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Negative Experiences and Understandings of Romanian and American Politics

Chapters Four and Five showed that Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area deplore the fragmentation of their community which they see as the result of political intrusions before and after 1989. As indicated in Chapter Five, surprisingly, Romanian refugees failed to escape political control when they left their home country behind and resettled in the United States. They soon realized that the repressive apparatus of communist Romania had infiltrated Romanian churches, organizations, embassies, consulates, and cultural centers in the U.S. Mutual suspicion, confusion, and fear grew among Romanian émigrés and tormenting questions troubled their daily lives: Who was sent by the communist regime to join their community? Which of their so-called “friends” and “acquaintances” were there to inform on them? How many community leaders such as priests, organization leaders, journalists, and other important figures of the exile were actually working for the Romanian political police, the infamous Securitate? Political accusations and heated arguments erupted frequently and led to community fragmentation.

A quarter century after the fall of communism, these struggles are still alive. The majority of my research participants, whether they came to the United States before or after 1989, continue experiencing Romanian politics as intrusive and disruptive of community life. Most are convinced that Securitate agents who infiltrated their community before the fall of communism have never left the U.S. and live among them. Moreover, post-communist Romanian politics is as corrupt and capable of upsetting their
lives as the former communist regime. Many Romanian community leaders (e.g.,
Romanian Orthodox priests, Romanian organization leaders, political representatives of
the diaspora in the Romanian Parliament, and employees of Romanian embassies,
consulates, and cultural centers) are suspected of collaboration with corrupt politicians in
the home country. Indeed, during fieldwork and interviews, I heard multiple stories about
Romanian community leaders who have a “shady” political past or maintain
“disreputable” relationships with dishonest politicians in Bucharest. One interviewee
promised to reveal the “true face of the Romanian community in New York.” He
described Romanian organizations as mafias engaged in never-ending scandals and led
by individuals with connections to former members of the nomenklatura and the
Securitate turned politicians after December 1989. This person left a Romanian
organization when he realized the “despicable stuff going on behind the façade” (personal
interview, May 21, 2011). He suggested that many Romanians are so disappointed with
community leaders that they have decided to stay away from Romanian organizations
altogether. These conflicts perpetuate the state of disunity in which the Romanian
community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area found itself when communism collapsed
in 1989.

As to American politics, Romanian immigrants and refugees’ experience has been at
least ambiguous if not equally unfortunate. American politics may be less corrupt and
controlling and more responsive to local needs, but it also has a darker side. According to
Romanian émigrés, U.S. foreign policy toward communist and post-communist Romania
has been naïve at best and hypocritical and destructive at worst. Before 1989, the United
States found an ally in Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu, one of the most ruthless dictators of the former Soviet bloc, because it saw Ceaușescu’s self-proclaimed independence from the Soviet Union as an opportunity to create a breach in the Soviet bloc. After 1989, the United States failed to offer enough support to Romania’s fledgling democratic institutions and, as a result, the country struggled with neo-communism for decades. In both cases, it was Romanian citizens and Romanian émigrés who suffered the consequences of non-democratic Romanian governments.

Given their traumatic political experiences, Romanian immigrants and refugees have developed a pessimistic understanding of politics. In their view, politics is deeply contentious. It is corrupt and invasive. It generates distrust, confusion, fear, anger, and revolt and all these feelings have given rise to accusations and fights and ultimately led to disunity.

6.3. Political Withdrawal: Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Primary Strategy of Coping with Contentious Politics

Since Romanian immigrants and refugees find Romanian politics traumatic and contentious and American politics ambiguous and unhelpful, they work hard to avoid political involvement. Indeed, most Romanian community leaders steer their churches and organizations away from politics toward religious and ethnocultural activities. Even the few organization leaders who have been determined to engage in politics at some point in their lives saw their projects fail and withdrew from politics after a period of disillusionment.

When asked about politics during fieldwork and interviews, most Romanian Orthodox priests remembered the highly charged atmosphere of distrust which had marked parish
life before 1989 and whose echoes are still noticeable today. As indicated in Chapter
Five, prior to the fall of communism, Romanian churchgoers believed that their churches
were targets of political infiltration by the Romanian communist regime and that priests
had been sent to the United States to spread “patriotic” (i.e., nationalistic, pro-regime)
propaganda and inform on them. Even priests who had spent years or decades in the
communist prisons at home were suspected of collaboration with the regime (see, for
instance, Marinescu 2009, 757-68). One Romanian Orthodox priest I interviewed
suggested that most of the priests who had served parishes in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan
area before 1989 had worked for the Securitate. In his view, “the individuals who
infiltrated churches were smart. They weren’t simply Securitate agents; they had
completed their higher education at theological seminaries and knew what they were
talking about. Thus, they were all the more dangerous because they had become well-
versed in strategies of manipulation and had the knowledge to put them into practice.” To
this observation he immediately added that he was one of the few honest priests who had
not collaborated with the regime: “I am the only living priest around here who actually
escaped from communist Romania. I wasn’t sent to the United States on a visa. I ran
away and arrived here as a political refugee. This is the reason I have lots of enemies.
Many do not like me because I am rather vocal but I have no one to fear” (personal
interview, May 29, 2011). Of course, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to verify
which and how many Romanian Orthodox priests worked for the Securitate prior to
1989, but what is certain is that suspicions, political accusations, and fights wreaked
havoc in the life of Romanian Orthodox parishes. According to my research participants,
many churches were empty at the time. Very few people participated in church services, went to confession, took communion, and got involved in church affairs. Since the fall of communism, the situation has improved somewhat in that more Romanians come to church, but they continue to fear that most informer priests are still around in their parishes. Suspicions, arguments about the priests’ political past, and even full-blown scandals continue to erupt today.

As a result, many of the Romanian Orthodox priests I interviewed consider politics detrimental to church life, especially when potential new members are turned away by political controversies because they do not know the priest or the other parishioners well and believe the malicious rumors circulating in the community. Thus, priests advise leaving politics aside and tending to spiritual matters instead. One Romanian Orthodox priest who came to the United States before 1989 admitted that arguments about the political infiltration of churches upset him greatly: “It is so easy to throw political accusations left and right, but how does one go about proving them? How can one even feel entitled to make such outrageous claims?” In his view, political scandals are divisive but he trusts that the people who have been part of the Romanian Orthodox church all along, i.e., those who have founded churches, continue to support them, and live in faith will not be swayed by these groundless accusations. He added that the church is a top priority for Romanians: “Ethnic restaurants may be full on Saturdays and Sundays but it is ultimately the church that weighs more in people’s hierarchy of values. They take the church seriously because it is so important to their lives” (personal interview, June 5, 2011). According to this priest, the church is primarily an institution which creates
communion and community regardless of people’s political beliefs and disagreements and this is what matters ultimately. Another Romanian Orthodox priest who came to the United States after 1989 was also familiar with Romanians’ disunity brought about by politics. He suggested that “politics should be of no concern to us; one needs to come to church to care for one’s soul first and foremost” (personal interview, February 22, 2011).

Many regular churchgoers too emphasize the importance of setting politics aside and living as good Christians within the church. One Romanian political refugee with whom I discussed during fieldwork recalled how he had helped found a Romanian Orthodox church in New York before 1989. He and other Romanians worked hard to build the church: “We ourselves lay one brick upon another in our spare time. It was all voluntary work.” However, once the church building had been completed and religious services were about to begin, a priest arrived from Romania to serve the parish. Romanian political refugees suspected the priest of collaboration with the communist regime and stopped going to church. In the words of my research participant, “We wanted nothing to do with politics. We were simply looking to practice our religion in peace, so we left the church we had built with our own hands and formed a different church hoping it would not be infiltrated as well” (personal interview, September 20, 2010).

Not only do Romanian priests and churchgoers avoid politics, many Romanian organization leaders withdraw from politics as well or steer their organizations away from political issues. They too have experienced Romanian politics as traumatic and destructive of community ties and American politics as ambiguous and ineffective, so they do their best to stay away from politics. Even the few organization leaders who have
been active in politics at one point in their lives abandoned their political commitments after a period of disillusionment.

Before 1989, some of the Romanian exiles in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area became politically engaged. They were determined to expose the horrors of Romanian communism and fight against them through all available means. Prominent among these activists was Nicholas Dima, an anti-communist Romanian dissident who had spent years in some of the darkest prisons of communist Romania. According to his book of memoirs *Journey to Freedom*, Dima escaped the country in the late 1960s, fled to Western Europe, and eventually settled in the United States. While living in New York, he and a former Romanian diplomat founded an organization called the Truth about Romania Committee to raise awareness about political repression in Romania and the numerous abuses committed by the Ceaușescu regime against its citizens. During the 1970s, the Truth about Romania Committee organized several rallies demanding that the communist Romanian government respect and protect human rights and allow the relatives of expatriates to leave the country for family reunification purposes. In addition, the organization leaders reached out to American media channels, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Senate to debunk Ceaușescu’s self-proclaimed status as the maverick of the Eastern bloc and protest the warm welcome he was given by Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter on his visits to the United States.

However, they faced obstacles both from within the Romanian community in New York and from American decision-makers. The leaders of the Truth about Romania Committee became the target of malicious rumors and attacks by other Romanians, some
of whom were thought to be collaborators of the communist regime (Dima 1989, 293-329). The former dissident recalls the disunity his political involvement brought about among Romanians:

As a student I had strived to integrate myself into American society, but as an immigrant I lived mostly in the Romanian “ghetto” of New York. My activities had triggered plenty of envy and bickering, and I was tired of it. Much worse, however, were the continuous attacks by a number of individuals whom we suspected of being communist agents. One of them was particularly vicious. After obtaining his American citizenship he rushed to visit Romania, and upon his return he began to publish a newspaper slandering everyone who was opposed to Ceaușescu’s policies. (310)

The leaders of the Truth about Romania Committee also faced accusations from their fellow Romanians while organizing a demonstration in support of Romanian dissident Paul Goma who had been arrested by the Securitate:

We in the West protested, as did many writers of international reputation such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Arthur Miller. The demonstration organized in New York by the Truth about Romania Committee, as well as much intervention by the American press and Congress, called attention once more to the situation of human rights in Romania and Eastern Europe. Interestingly, we were attacked in particular by a certain group of Romanians in exile and their publications. Their arguments this time were the same as those spread by the Secret Police in Romania in order to discredit Goma. (319)

Not only did Dima’s political involvement give rise to suspicion, accusations, fights, and dissension among Romanians, it also met with indifference and resistance from American decision-makers. When Ceaușescu visited the United States in December 1973, he was well received by President Richard Nixon. As indicated in Chapter Five, the U.S. saw Ceaușescu as a liberal leader who was determined to remain independent from Moscow. Therefore, it sought to build a friendly relationship with him in the hope of destabilizing the Soviet Union. However, the Truth about Romania Committee wanted to expose Ceaușescu for what he really was: one of the most ruthless dictators of the Eastern
bloc. They protested against Ceaușescu’s visit to Washington by organizing a street rally and giving the American press their perspective on the event. However, the efforts of Dima’s organization fell on deaf ears:

Nobody paid any attention to us. Ceaușescu was the man of his time, almost lionized by the Western media (...) Our demonstration of protest and press releases went practically unnoticed. Gradually and without realizing it, we had become the bad guys, out of step with the new reality, just as we had been labeled once years ago in our native country, now taken over by communism. (308)

As the 1970s wore on, the leaders of the Truth about Romania Committee experienced growing disappointment and resignation at the U.S. policy toward Romania: “Despite our efforts, we could not change the tide. In April 1978 President Carter gave Ceaușescu and his wife a royal welcome to Washington” (321). Their disillusionment with American foreign policy culminated in October 1978 when Dima invited anti-communist Romanian dissident Paul Goma to speak to members of the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate about the Ceaușescu regime and the tortures he had undergone as a political detainee. One of the most extensive discussions took place in the office of Senator Henry Jackson of Washington State who “wanted to understand the treacherous situation of a country whose citizens were suppressed and whose leader was enjoying an undeserved international reputation.” Goma explained that Ceaușescu’s independence from Moscow was “only a diversion, a smoke screen behind which he could do everything he wanted” while human rights were gravely violated in communist Romania. One of the leaders of the Truth about Romania Committee added in support of Goma:

Honorable Senator, what the Romanian people want now, which Mr. Goma mentioned on previous occasions, is that if America cannot help the people, it should at least stop helping Ceaușescu and his regime. Many refugees have already noticed that since the signing of the Helsinki Accords, and since the United States granted Romania “Most
Favored Nation” status, life in Romania has become more and more difficult, both economically and politically.

To these pleas for help, the senator replied that America would like Eastern Europe and Romania to become free, but it could not accomplish this goal “without causing false hopes and a war.” The leaders of the Truth about Romania Committee saw their efforts at exposing the abuses of the Ceaușescu regime and effecting a change in U.S. foreign policy toward Romania come to naught: “We told the whole truth, only to find out that nothing could be done. Fear of a nuclear war gave free rein to the communist dictatorships, while restraining the democratic governments of the free world. A sad impasse for humanity!” (324)

Dima and his partners felt discouraged. Given the suspicions, accusations, and scandals which had erupted within the Romanian community and the indifference and ineffectiveness of American decision-makers, they grew less certain of the worth of their political goals. Moreover, political involvement became an even heavier burden because Romanians were reluctant to help with the organization:

Looking down, speaking sadly and slowly, I said, “The battle is lost, Mr. Coste. We are fighting a losing cause. I am constantly in touch with the new generation of refugees and can see how difficult it is to convince them to participate in our actions. Your generation is old and tired. The new generation is confused. In a few years, we will be just a handful of people fighting the windmills like Don Quixote.” (313-4)

At the end of the 1970s, Dima withdrew from politics and directed all his energy to Orthodox spirituality while the Truth about Romania Committee slowed down its political activity. Dima’s political withdrawal was anticipated by a discussion with one of his mentors Vasile Posteucă which had taken place at the beginning of the 1970s: “Early in my Columbia years, Posteucă, who had published the prison poems, sent me a Bible
and insisted that I concentrate on my spiritual life because my political activity would not take me anywhere” (297). Later on, Posteucă told his young mentee: “You know, Nic (...) I gave up politics long ago and placed my faith in God. He is the only one who can understand fully and judge us in the incredibly complex situations in which we live. I no longer understand politics and I wonder if anyone can possibly combine faith in God with tricky politics, but you can try” (299). Dima tried and saw his political efforts fail, so he withdrew from politics and devoted his life to the Orthodox Christian faith:

What has gone wrong? What a godless world, with everything perpetrated in the name of justice, truth, progress, and even in the name of God. Has God abandoned us, or have we abandoned Him? Yes, this is probably why I have run into so many dead ends. I have almost forgotten God myself. Long ago, when I was in big trouble I made a promise. Did I keep it? I have wrapped myself up totally in politics, but politics did not take me anywhere. Yes, there should be a better way.

It was in those gloomy days and under those sad conditions that I came to embrace a more Christian attitude. It was neither easy nor simple, and it took a lot of soul-searching and philosophizing. Slowly, however, I resigned most of my political preoccupations and found new meaning in life. For the first time, I could look at my native country as if detached from this earth, as if “saved” for sharing its trouble. (328-9)

This kind of political withdrawal occurred after 1989 as well and for similar reasons. During the 1990s, one of the few politically active persons within the Romanian community in New York was Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner, founder of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Organization of Romanian Democracy (ACORD). ACORD had eight members and operated between 1991 and 1998. Its goal was lobbying for Romania’s transition to democracy.

As indicated in Chapter Five, Ion Iliescu became the first Romanian president after the collapse of communism and remained in power for six consecutive years (1990-1996). He was followed by President Emil Constantinescu (1996-2000) but when
Constantinescu’s mandate ended, Iliescu was reelected to the presidential office for another four years (2000-2004). Romanian immigrants and refugees see Iliescu as a member of the communist nomenklatura who hijacked the Romanian revolution and grabbed power with the support of his party fellows and the Securitate. They hold Iliescu responsible for thwarting the country’s transition to democracy.

Thus, the main goal of ACORD was to fight against the Iliescu regime by exposing government abuses and raising awareness of its non-democratic practices among American decision-makers. As Vrăbiescu Kleckner states in her book of memoirs, “After the revolution of December 1989, we realized that former communists turned democrats overnight and the Securitate oligarchy continued governing the country. I came to believe that a lobby was necessary to reveal the truth about Romania. I made every effort to found a new political committee which became known as ACORD” (2006, 398). The leaders of ACORD sought to find out what had really happen during the Romanian revolution, or rather the 1989 coup d’état as they called it. They also condemned the Romanian government’s use of violence against civil society activists, the slow economic reform and fraudulent privatization programs aimed at yielding financial advantages to members of the former nomenklatura and the Securitate, and the politically controlled media. ACORD sent letters, memoranda, and reports to the U.S. president, to members of the Congress, and to the American media to inform them about Romania’s stalled political and economic transition. It also supported the restoration of monarchy in Romania and the country’s accession to NATO. Between June 1999 and December 2000, the founder of ACORD served as personal counsellor to President Emil Constantinescu.
At the time, most Romanian immigrants and refugees saw Constantinescu as a democratic public figure and potential savior of Romania after six years of neo-communism (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2004; 2006).

However, Vrăbiescu Kleckner’s political activity came to an end soon after a scandal broke out within the organization. The founder of ACORD was accused of employing non-democratic procedures in running the organization and using it for personal goals to the exclusion of other organization leaders. These attacks were initiated by a former Romanian political detainee and member of ACORD, and prompted inquiries into his own political past. Well-known Romanian journalists from New York published articles about his alleged collaboration with the Securitate and his expulsion from the Association of Former Political Detainees on the grounds that he had been imprisoned on criminal rather than political charges (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 329-40). Vrăbiescu Kleckner was inclined to believe in the truth of these statements about her accuser. However, she also noted:

I cannot accuse this man of having been a Securitate informer or engaging in Secret Police maneuvers to bring about disunity within ACORD or the newspaper Lumea Liberă Românească [Free Romanian World] because I do not have enough proof for the time being. But what I can accuse him of is his propensity to spread malicious rumors and turn the leaders of these organizations against one another. Such moves on his part may have had a lot to do with our determination to fight against neo-communism and the Iliescu regime. (338)

Not only did Vrăbiescu Kleckner suspect her accuser of collaboration with the former communist regime, she also suggested that after the fall of communism he may have become a supporter of neo-communist President Ion Iliescu and started the scandal to prevent ACORD from exposing the corruption of the Iliescu administration. Such
suspicions are difficult to confirm but what is certain is that the founder of ACORD considered this “a difficult period for her reputation” (339). As she put it, the man who accused her “had managed to cause misunderstandings and fights among the leaders of ACORD and to bring about disunity within the only two politically active organizations in the Romanian émigré community of New York, namely ACORD and the newspaper Lumea Liberă Românească [Free Romanian World]” (338).

American decision-makers were only partly helpful to ACORD as well. In her book of memoirs, Vrăbiescu Kleckner recalls a U.S. Congress debate about granting post-communist Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status. The debate took place in 1996, a few months before the Romanian presidential elections. Since the incumbent neo-communist President Ion Iliescu was running against democratic challenger Emil Constantinescu, ACORD advised Congress to refrain from granting Romania “Most Favored Nation” status unconditionally or at least hold off on it until after the elections (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 294). An unconditional clause would have conveyed “support for Iliescu and acceptance of the corruption of his administration.” Congress needed to help Romania by “granting it conditional ‘Most Favored Nation’ status as a mechanism of checking the country’s progress to democracy” (295). Also, granting Romania permanent “Most Favored Nation” status before the presidential elections would have enabled Iliescu to claim this as an achievement of his administration. Vrăbiescu Kleckner argued that Congress needed to postpone its decision about Romania’s “Most Favored Nation” status until after the elections in order to prevent Iliescu and the neo-communist elite around him from using it to their advantage during the campaign (294-5).
A few members of Congress were in agreement with ACORD. One of them stated that “U.S. foreign policy should support Romania rather than simply consider the mutual trade benefits of granting the country ‘Most Favored Nation’ status. Romania is the only Eastern European country still governed by former communists. If Bucharest has nothing to hide, why not wait a few months and grant the country permanent status after the presidential elections?” (295). However, most members of Congress voted against the suggestions advanced by ACORD and in favor of permanent “Most Favored Nation” status for Romania (300-4). Their decision constituted a great disappointment for the founder of ACORD.

Torn by inner struggles and shaken by lack of support from American decision-makers, ACORD ceased its political activity. Vrăbiescu Kleckner served as personal counsellor to President Emil Constantinescu for another year and a half but faced harsh criticism for the failures of the Constantinescu administration from the émigré community in New York (2004, 323-42). Romanian immigrants and refugees had seen Constantinescu as a democratic leader capable of saving Romania from neo-communism and putting it on a path to democracy. While Constantinescu accomplished some of his initial goals, he also failed to combat government corruption, reform the criminal justice system, and communicate effectively with the population to win support for his decisions (303-22). Toward the end of his mandate, he declared himself “defeated by the former Securitate” (280) and withdrew his candidacy from the upcoming presidential campaign. This move practically handed the presidency back to Iliescu and caused great disappointment among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA
metropolitan area. They saw Iliescu’s reelection as a return to neo-communism. One Romanian political refugee stated in an interview: “The Communist Party was to blame for the horrors that took place in Romania before the revolution. But the neo-communists led by Iliescu are even guiltier because the chaos and disaster Romania currently finds itself in is their fault. They did everything they could to thwart democratization” (personal interview, November 9, 2010). The founder of ACORD went through a period of depression and started questioning the worth of her political efforts (273-302, 343). Eventually, she decided to withdraw from politics. In her book of memoirs, she recalls the advice her father gave her when she graduated from law school: “I think you should devote your life to research, teaching, or legal counselling. Whatever you do, avoid politics. It gets one into trouble and causes a great deal of disappointment” (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 63). When she withdrew from politics, Vrăbiescu Kleckner regretted not having followed this suggestion earlier in her career:

If I had listened to my father’s advice, I would have devoted my life to research instead of getting involved in politics. This way I would have been able to save my reputation by avoiding the harsh criticisms published in newspapers of the émigré community and in the Romanian media. But at the risk of repeating myself, I want to say this: I have a clean conscience because I have tried to do my best for my native country which I love with all my heart. (405)

Nicholas Dima and Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner are among the few Romanian organization leaders who spent years organizing political activities before and after 1989. While in the beginning they relied on the support of several loyal organization members, their political engagement caused so much tension within the Romanian community that they began questioning the worth of their efforts. They faced suspicions about their political goals, accusations and attacks aimed at harming their reputations, and harsh
criticisms of their actions and decisions. These inner organization struggles coupled with
the indifference of American politicians led them to withdraw from politics. Politics
proved too traumatic, contentious, and disappointing for them and the broader
community of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

These are the reasons most other Romanian organization leaders never consider
engaging in politics in the first place. “George,” the leader of the oldest and most active
Romanian organization in New York, articulated this view eloquently. According to
“George,” politics is treacherous terrain. As soon as Romanians tread on it, their already
tenuous community ties break down fast: mutual suspicion, political accusations,
arguments, and full-blown scandals erupt and become difficult to contain. When I asked
“George” about the goals of his organization, he replied that the organization was not
“politically affiliated” because politics is “full of liars and hypocrites.” I had not
mentioned politics at all prior to this remark but “George” wanted to set matters straight
from the beginning so that his leadership would not be mistaken for “dirty” political
machinations. As soon as he made sure politics was out of the way, he went on to talk
about the goals of his organization: morality, culture, and philanthropy. He put particular
emphasis on the “moral integrity of his organization members” as a way of
counterbalancing potential suspicions about their political commitments (personal
interview, September 7, 2010). The organization focuses on Romanian art and
ethnocultural traditions. As indicated in Chapter Four, it organizes annual spring and fall
festivals involving ethnic food and drinks, exhibitions of folk costumes, traditional music
and dances, as well as sales of Romanian books, DVDs, and arts and crafts. The
organization also participates in annual events such as the International Cultures Parade organized by the International Immigrants Foundation in New York and the Romania Day Festival on Broadway. Besides these ethnocultural activities, the organization undertakes charity work: it collects donations for various humanitarian causes in Romania and the United States (e.g., helping Romanian orphans, sending money to Romanian victims of natural disasters, supporting other Romanian ethnocultural organizations within the émigré community in the U.S.), covers funeral expenses incurred by Romanian immigrants and refugees who have had a death in the family, and provides free lunches in memory of the departed.

Like “George’s” organization, most other Romanian organizations in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area exclude politics from their agenda. Some focus on ethnocultural issues. For instance, Dacia Revival International Society in New York specializes in the history and practices of ancient Thracian peoples who lived on the territory of current Romania prior to the Roman occupation of 101-102 AD. The organization mission statement available on its web site http://www.dacia.org/dacia-rev/ makes it clear that the organization is not involved in politics: “This is a cultural organization undertaking cultural and scientific activities from a multidisciplinary perspective. The organization is not affiliated with any political party.” It organizes international conferences and symposia, issues a journal titled Dacia Magazin, and maintains a discussion forum on topics related to ancient Thracian culture and civilization. Another Romanian organization called the Romanian-American League maintains a Romanian ethnic museum with branches in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This organization got engaged
in Romanian politics for a brief period of time around the presidential elections of 1996 when it supported democratic candidate Emil Constantinescu against the incumbent neo-communist president Ion Iliescu. However, over the years it has largely been devoted to ethnocultural and economic activities. The museum contains Romanian folk costumes, painted furniture, glassware, pottery, textiles, and traditional rugs, as well as a collection of photographs illustrating the history of Romanian immigration to the United States. It runs arts and crafts booths at festivals and fairs, issues audio-visual lectures, and organizes round tables on Romanian culture and civilization at churches, public libraries, and universities. Also, it seeks to establish viable economic relationships between Romania and the United States by promoting Romanian artisans in the U.S. and helping them to sell their artifacts. Yet another Romanian organization called the “Bănățeana” Romanian-American Cultural Society is affiliated with the “Descent of the Holy Spirit” Romanian Orthodox church in Elkins Park, PA. The society organizes Christmas and Easter lunches and dinners, community meals on religious holidays and the yearly anniversary of the church, and ethnic festivals involving traditional food and drinks as well as folk music and dances. It also supports an ethnic museum located in a room within the church. The museum contains various items belonging to an earlier wave of Romanian immigrants who came to the United States around the turn of the twentieth century: historical membership badges, cards, pins, and ribbons, folk costumes, organization charters and documents, embroidered flags, and old photographs, portraits, and paintings.
Other Romanian organizations focus on religious and literary matters. The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality in New York specializes in theology, spirituality, and culture. It organizes symposia, public conferences, and a literary circle where presenters discuss the work of classical and contemporary Romanian writers. Since 1996, the institute has been issuing the journal *Lumină Lină* [Gracious Light] which features poems and other literary pieces by classical and contemporary Romanian writers, essays on religious and cultural topics, and reviews of books by Romanian authors around the world. In 2013, the literary circle of the institute celebrated twenty years of uninterrupted activity. On this occasion, Romanian writer and director of the Romanian Cultural Institute in New York Doina Uricariu commended the literary circle for overcoming political divisions and bringing Romanians together in the name of their shared appreciation of cultural values. Her speech is reproduced in an article titled “La Mulți Ani Cenaclului literar “Mihai Eminescu” din New York la douăzeci de ani de activitate neîntreruptă pusă în slujba românilor” [Congratulations to the “Mihai Eminescu” Literary Circle in New York on Twenty Years of Community Activity] published by Mariana Terra in the October/December 2013 issue of the magazine *Lumină Lină. Revistă de spiritualitate și cultură românească* [Gracious Light. Review of Romanian Spirituality and Culture]:

We have been divided for a long time, but love of culture and of one another and the power to turn evil into good are important values and it is precisely these values that the literary circle we celebrate today has upheld over the years (...) I praise you for finding a way to stay together, I praise you for what you have done and continue to do for Romanian literature, I praise you for your generosity and talent. This literary circle is a source of strength. It is a cultural institution which preserves our national traditions and identity. (111)
Yet other Romanian organizations focus on professional and student-related matters. The Romanian Medical Society of New York provides a space for meetings of Romanian medical professionals. It also offers educational programs to its members and financial aid and advice to medical students and patients. The Romanian Business Professionals, the Romanian-American Society of New York, and the Romanian-American Chamber of Commerce organize conferences, meetings, and special events devoted to member networking and career advancement. These organizations also support the development of prosperous business relations between Romania and the United States. The Romanian Student Association at Columbia University organizes student conferences on topics related to Romanian language, culture, and society, get-togethers featuring traditional Romanian food and drinks, and film screenings. In sum, all these Romanian organizations specialize in ethnocultural, religious, spiritual, and professional matters to the exclusion of politics.

This is the case of Romanian Voice Television in New York as well. Romanian Voice Television is the only television program targeting the Romanian community in New York. It broadcasts a thirty-minute weekly program on WNYE-TV. In the article “Emisiune pentru românii din New York” [Television Program for Romanians in New York] published in the online newspaper jurnalul.ro on November 11, 2004, one of the founders of Romanian Voice Television Elias Wexler stated: “We don’t do politics here. We simply broadcast news and snippets of community life.” When he arrived in the United States in 1974, he found a “small and disunited Romanian community” and
wanted to help it come together, although in his view “this does not happen very often among Romanians here.”

In 1995, a year before the Romanian presidential elections of 1996, Romanian Voice Television broadcast several interviews with the incumbent President Ion Iliescu. This drew severe criticism from Romanian immigrants and refugees. They see Iliescu as a neo-communist who stole the Romanian revolution with the help of the former nomenklatura and the Securitate, took over the presidency, and stalled Romania’s transition to democracy. A relevant article in this regard titled “Romanian Voice TV din New York asaltat de sponsori ‘de bine’” [Romanian Voice TV in New York Besieged by ‘Well-Meaning’ Sponsors] originally published in Lumea Liberă Românească [Free Romanian World] on November 4, 1995 and reproduced in Pleșea warned that Iliescu had “monopolized” air time: “Iliescu’s televised appearances have increased in number and look more and more like electoral advertising (despite the fact that with very few exceptions, Romanians in New York have never supported Iliescu’s candidacy)” (1999, 104). As journalist Gabriel Pleșea noted, other important events had occurred during this period: independent journalists were denied access to Iliescu’s press conferences, a well-known Romanian émigré journalist was verbally and physically harassed by a member of Iliescu’s team, and two anti-Iliescu protests took place in New York. However, these events received no coverage on Romanian Voice Television. This imbalance violated political impartiality. As a result, Pleșea suggested that Romanian Voice Television “should strive to broadcast quality programs” and “its owner must practice what he has
learned from his American counterparts, namely to refrain from putting his credibility and integrity up for sale” (106-7).

Since Romanian Voice Television had addressed a controversial political topic, it raised suspicions of collaboration with corrupt Romanian politicians and incurred prompt criticism. It also risked losing his Romanian audience in New York. As a result, its owner decided to avoid politics as much as possible following this incident. Indeed, political programs are currently extremely scarce on Romanian Voice Television. The online archive of Romanian Voice Television available on its web site and Youtube covers seven years of activity (2008-2015). Out of tens of videos uploaded to these web sites only a few are devoted to political issues. Two videos feature Romanian immigrants and refugees voting in the Romanian presidential elections of 2014 and three videos present the visits to the United States paid by Romanian Ministers of Foreign Affairs Theodor Baconschi and Titus Corlățean in 2010 and 2012, respectively. Both Baconschi and Corlățean met with representatives of the Romanian community in New York and answered questions about American visas for Romanian citizens, the tense relationship between the Romanian Cultural Institute and the Romanian community in New York, and the fairness of elections for the diaspora seats in the Romanian Parliament. These political videos are exceptions. The vast majority of programs on Romanian Voice Television avoid politics and focus on Romanian Orthodox celebrations held in New York and neighboring states, ethnocultural festivals, get-togethers at ethnic restaurants, and symposia on linguistic, cultural and historical themes. Romanian Voice Television
also presents classic and contemporary Romanian artists and writers, athletes, and fashion designers.

Similarly, the online forum of the Romanian community in New York Conectii.ro contains no section specifically devoted to politics. Political posts are very rare, and when they do get published they are accompanied by disclaimers. One post featuring political content was “Adrian Anghel—candidat diaspora la Senatul României” [Adrian Anghel—Candidate for Diaspora Seat in the Romanian Parliament] published on December 4, 2012. This was an informative note about Adrian Anghel, candidate of the Social Liberal Union (USL), a center-left party coalition between the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Center-Right Alliance (ACD). Romanian immigrants and refugees see PSD as the party of the former communist nomenklatura and the Securitate. Hence Anghel’s candidacy was bound to raise suspicion and controversy. Thus, the founders of the online forum included the following statement before Anghel’s political advertisement:

Our team at Conectii.ro has received Mr. Adrian Anghel’s request to post information about his candidacy for the diaspora seat in the Romanian Parliament. Following a long discussion with him, we decided to post this information despite the fact that we do not do politics at Conectii.ro. This way, we hope that Romanians in New York will get to know Mr. Anghel better. He has double citizenship (Romanian and American) and came to the United States as a political refugee before the revolution. After 1989, he became a successful businessman in Romania: he owned MTV Romania. His education is in sports and pre-medical studies.

Even criticisms of Romanian politicians and political life are posted with caution to the online forum of the Romanian community in New York and accompanied by similar disclaimers. One such post was an open letter addressed to Romanian Senator Viorel Badea and published on the forum on December 1, 2011. It was written by a former Romanian academic researcher who emigrated to the United Kingdom because he could
not provide for his family. The letter is a scathing denunciation of political corruption in post-communist Romania: “Political mafias succeeding one another in positions of power forced me and millions of fellow Romanians to leave our country, our language, and our friends and family behind and seek bread and justice elsewhere.” Most Romanian immigrants and refugees share this view. Hence, this would not have been a controversial post, yet the founders of the online forum still took precautions and included the following disclaimer:

Our team at Conectii.ro has received a political commentary written by Mr. Ioan-Florin Florescu, PhD and former academic researcher at A. I. Cuza University of Iaşi, Romania, who left his home country for financial reasons and currently works as delivery man at an Indian restaurant in the U.K. We would like to reaffirm that we do not do politics at Conectii.ro and only publish texts of interest to our local community. However, although Mr. Florescu lives in a different country, his experience may be relevant to some of us who chose to leave our home country behind and emigrate. Thus, we have decided to publish his commentary with the clear caveat that it does not necessarily reflect our views at Conectii.ro.

Such political posts preceded by cautious disclaimers are rarely found on the online forum of the Romanian community in New York. As indicated above, the forum explicitly avoids politics and discourages political discussions. Most posts refer to religious celebrations at Romanian Orthodox churches in the city, ethnocultural events such as spring and fall festivals, lectures and conferences on Romanian language, culture, and spirituality, and professional success stories of Romanians émigrés.

In sum, most Romanian priests, organization leaders, and media professionals avoid politics because they know it is dangerous terrain. Romanian immigrants and refugees have vivid memories of communist repression and talk about the “long arm” of the regime reaching into their community and infiltrating their churches, organizations, and
daily lives prior to 1989. Post-communist Romanian politics is just as corrupt and controlling and continues to stir up suspicion, accusations, arguments, and dissension within the Romanian émigré community. Moreover, Romanian immigrants and refugees have experienced American foreign policy as ambiguous and unhelpful in their struggles against repression. Since politics tends to open old and recent wounds and tear apart an already fragmented community, most Romanian community leaders in the United States make efforts to exclude it from churches, organizations, and traditional and online media frequented by Romanian émigrés. Instead, they focus on activities and events which bring people together: religious celebrations, ethnocultural festivals, folk traditions, discussions about language, literature, visual art, and music, and professional meetings. Even the few Romanian community leaders who did become politically engaged at some point in their lives ended up regretting their choice and withdrawing from politics.

6.4. Political Independence: Romanian Immigrants and Refugees’ Rare Strategy of Engaging in Contentious Politics

While most Romanian community leaders withdraw from politics to avoid contention, there are exceptions. A small number of Romanian community leaders have become involved in politics over shorter or longer periods of time. It is noteworthy that the few Romanians who have chosen to be politically active have almost always done so from an “independent” position. They make it clear that they take an interest in Romanian politics but are determined to remain unaffiliated with any political parties and to criticize all those in power or aspiring to occupy positions of power. This is another strategy of coping with contentious politics: while most Romanian community leaders abandon the political world, a few become politically active without committing themselves to any
interest group. It is a way of being both active in politics and detached from its corrupting influence and the controversy this might create among their co-ethnics.

The “Iuliu Maniu” American-Romanian Relief Foundation is a Romanian organization with branches in New York and Boston. It operated between 1950 and 2009 when it had to close doors due to lack of funding. The organization was primarily devoted to helping Romanian political refugees resettle in the United States and providing financial aid to Romanian students. However, it also engaged in some political activities. For instance, its leaders encouraged Romanian political refugees to “keep alive the flame of democracy in their country of origin” (Metes 1977, iii) by discussing the abuses committed by the communist government against its citizens and commemorating Romanian public figures who suffered and died in communist prisons. As indicated in the article “Fundația ‘Iuliu Maniu’ își va închide porțile” [“Iuliu Maniu” Foundation Will Close Doors] published in New York Magazin on October 28, 2009, the organization also raised awareness about Romanian neo-communism. According to its members, the Romanian revolution was betrayed and stolen by a few Moscow-educated communists who grabbed power and manipulated the popular uprising of December 1989 to gain political advantage. As a result, the country’s transition to democracy was derailed and communism gave way to neo-communism. Given their political activity, the leaders of the “Iuliu Maniu” Foundation took precautions in formulating the organization mission statement. To prevent suspicion and attacks, they assured Romanian immigrants and refugees of their honest intentions and political independence: “Due to its integrity and following its moral strategy, the foundation kept above partisan politics, its leadership
never vacillating on principles, thus achieving and enjoying an impeccable prestige in the United States and abroad” (Metes 1977, iii). Thus, the organization engaged in politics and criticized Romanian communism and neo-communism while also remaining detached from power struggles and political factions.

A few other Romanian organizations involved in politics have taken a similar approach. As indicated above, the Ad Hoc Committee for the Organization of Romanian Democracy (ACORD) operated between 1991 and 1998. It lobbied for Romania’s democratic transition and raised awareness among American decision-makers about the corruption of the neo-communist Iliescu regime. ACORD supported Romanian opposition parties against Iliescu’s Social Democratic Party (PSD) but ACORD leaders stated clearly that the organization “was not affiliated with any political party and supported all opposition parties equally” (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 109). Thus, ACORD got involved in politics but at the same time affirmed its political independence in order to prevent suspicions and controversy among Romanian immigrants and refugees. Opposition parties formed a coalition called the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR) which defeated the neo-communist Social Democratic Party (PSD) in the parliamentary elections of 1996. The CDR candidate Emil Constantinescu won the Romanian presidential elections in the same year. While ACORD members supported CDR and Emil Constantinescu, most ended up criticizing them for their failure to set Romania on a firm path to democracy: economic reform remain incomplete, major social crises wreaked havoc in the country, and government disunity led to inefficiency. Hence, ACORD eventually detached itself from Romanian opposition parties as well.
The best political solution ACORD envisioned for Romania was the restoration of monarchy,¹ a view shared by most Romanian immigrants and refugees in New York as yet another way of affirming their political independence: the king would have been above the fray of post-communist politics and would have kept power struggles in check, eliminated corruption, and set the country on a path to democracy and integration into the Western world. When several members of the former Romanian royal family visited New York, a leader of ACORD articulated his support for monarchy as follows:

The Romanian community in New York is happy to give your Majesty our warmest greetings and reaffirm our strong commitment to restoring Romanian monarchy which was abruptly terminated on December 30. <Long round of applause> Romanian history was derailed for half a century, but today it needs to shake off the veil of falsehood and reveal the bright humanity and courage that marked the rule of your Majesty. (Vrăbiescu Kleckner 2006, 171-2)

ACORD founder Vrăbiescu Kleckner explained the importance of monarchy for the democratization of Romania:

We [Romanian émigrés] realized that Romania’s transition to democracy necessitated a break with the past, which could only be achieved by a government able to make radical changes and expose the abuses of the former Securitate. We believed that this would have been easier to accomplish in 1990 immediately after the revolution because the communist elite was scared at the time. We were optimistic!

And that is the reason we supported the restoration of monarchy (…) Monarchy would have ensured a smooth and efficient transition to democracy. We firmly believed that under the rule of the king, chaos would have been turned into order and the rule of law would have prevailed in Romania and facilitated its integration into NATO and the European Union. (398)

ACORD and many Romanian immigrants and refugees see all Romanian political factions as either directly associated with Ceaușescu’s repressive communist regime and,

---

¹ Romania was a constitutional monarchy between 1881 and 1947. On December 30, 1947, King Michael of Romania was forced to abdicate by a communist-dominated government. Monarchy was abolished and replaced by a “People’s Republic.”
thus, tainted by corruption or as democratically-minded but grossly inefficient. In this context, monarchy would have been a guarantor of democracy. A monarch would have signaled a break with the past and prevented the post-communist turmoil caused by power-hungry politicians and interest groups.

In sum, ACORD was a politically active organization which strived to remain politically independent in order to maintain its reputation and prevent suspicion and attacks from Romanian émigrés. It never became affiliated with any Romanian political party, not even the opposition parties it supported for a while against the neo-communist Social Democratic Party (PSD). Also, ACORD advocated for the restoration of monarchy precisely because a monarch would have governed post-communist Romania without adhering to warring political factions. But even though ACORD made efforts to remain politically independent, it was eventually torn apart by suspicions about its members’ political goals.

My only interviewee who is currently active in politics declared himself politically independent as well. Grigore Culian is the founder and owner of New York Magazin, the most widely read Romanian newspaper in New York and neighboring states. At the beginning of his career as a journalist, Culian was determined to keep the newspaper free of politics. In his introduction to the first issue of New York Magazin published on April 4, 1997, he stated:

I wish to make it clear from the very beginning that this newspaper will not respond to any provocations and will not deal with politics (...) Of course, many are going to wonder who is behind this newspaper. I can tell you in all honesty that New York Magazin has not come into being as a result of a business transaction and is not financed by wealthy persons looking for advertising. This newspaper represents the hard work of a few enthusiastic individuals who want to build rather than destroy and
to promote harmony instead of discord, mutual understanding instead of hatred, and communion instead of isolation.

Since Romanian immigrants and refugees view politics as murky, Culian made efforts to gain their trust by anticipating their suspicions and putting them to rest from the start. He knew that many would believe that the newspaper had, in fact, been founded by corrupt and powerful politicians or interest groups looking to manipulate public opinion in their favor. Such suspicions would give rise to attacks, arguments, and fights, and eventually tear the émigré community apart instead of bringing it together. Culian attempted to present himself as a regular member of the Romanian émigré community and be as transparent as possible with regard to his intentions and the creation of New York Magazin. He reassured his future readers that he had not made any shady deals with Romanian politicians and, in fact, did not plan to engage in politics at all. Culian also tried to allay their fears of disunity. He affirmed his desire to issue an apolitical publication which would bring Romanians together rather than drive them apart.

However, over time New York Magazin began addressing political issues. In a recent annotated history of the newspaper, Culian added a note to his own introduction to the first issue of the newspaper explaining why he had changed his mind about politics:

Although in the beginning I had not intended for this publication to have a political focus, the constant deterioration of Romanian society following the events of December 1989 forced me to take a stand against the abuses committed by the Romanian political class in its entirety. Even though I live far away from the country where I learned to walk, speak, and read, I cannot turn a blind eye to the moral disaster generated by the incompetent individuals who used the Romanian revolution to their own advantage. (Burlacu and Burlacu 2012, 12)

Having decided to become engaged in politics and knowing this is a risky endeavor among Romanian immigrants and refugees, Culian made efforts to maintain a good
reputation and affirm his political independence to ward off suspicions about his political goals and affiliations.

During our field discussions and interview, Culian emphasized his moral integrity. He repeatedly assured me that he has “absolutely nothing to hide” (personal interview, March 12, 2011), his conscience is not for sale, and his entire life history has been put up on the newspaper web site for everyone to see. He also explained that he has never succumbed to political pressures and his newspaper cannot be bought by any Romanian political party regardless of the amount of money involved. In an interview titled “Grigore Culian, fondator și editor New York Magazin: ‘Le spun americanilor că vin din cea mai frumoasă țară din lume’” [Grigore Culian, Founder and Editor of New York Magazin: ‘I Tell Americans that I Come from the Most Beautiful Country on Earth’”]

published by Dana Maria (Achim) Dezotell in the Romanian journal Național [National News] on June 13, 2013, Culian asserted:

Moral integrity is instilled in early childhood, during the first seven years of life more or less. It depends on the way one is raised and on parents’ behavior at home. I take after my late father who was a fighter for justice and a person who never accepted compromise or betrayal. In fact, these two vices are foreign to my ethnic group. My father was Armenian and I inherited his honesty. I also learned persistence from my Romanian mother who worked tirelessly her entire life. Over time, many have tried to buy my newspaper, particularly during the Iliescu-Năstase regime whose representatives wanted to maintain a good reputation abroad. I rejected all of these attempts. I am a product of the Romanian community in New York and I have duties and responsibilities to it. In fact, if it had not been for my Romanian-American readers, I would have found a different career. The success or failure of my newspaper depends on them. People know me around here. I would not want them to give me the cold shoulder when they meet me in the street.

Besides his moral integrity, Culian emphasized his political independence. He understands that political engagement in a world where politics is fraught with tension
requires detachment from political factions and power struggles. Thus, he repeatedly
explained that he has always avoided compromise and affiliation with any interest group,
even though this often meant losing money and better opportunities. In an article titled
“Grigore Culian, un ziarist român la New York și ziarul lui care face istoria” [Grigore
Culian, a Romanian Journalist from New York and His Legendary Newspaper] published
by Magdalena Popa Buluc in the Romanian journal Cotidianul [Daily News] on August
14, 2013, Culian’s newspaper is described as follows:

Other newspapers have been chameleonic in changing their owners, their political
views, and the range of their opinions because they lack integrity and give in to
opportunism and consumerism. However, in a world where everything is for sale, New
York Magazin has held fast to basic principles of the press. It has never made a pact
with the devil; it has not sold its soul to any pressure group. Of course, the owner of
New York Magazin does not delude himself: there is no such thing as having
everything under the sun. There are no miracles; there are only compromising
partnerships involving blackmail, vulgarity, aggression, and slander from which true
journalists must shield themselves. Information quality and Grigore Culian’s political
independence have made New York Magazin an excellent newspaper of the Romanian
diaspora in the United States.

Culian asserts his political independence by denouncing political corruption among
decision-makers at all levels of the Romanian government regardless of their political
affiliation. During our interview, he stated: “It is ethical to criticize those in power
because they are the only ones who commit abuse. They have the power to commit
abuse, so one has to take a stand. The moment you become obedient, you are no longer a
journalist; you have become something else. You are getting paid to look the other way
and ignore the truth.” Culian takes pride in his role as a “very tough and very harsh” critic
of power who speaks frankly and fearlessly (personal interview, March 12, 2011). In New
York Magazin, he has published scathing articles about all the political regimes that ruled

According to Culian, the neo-communist Iliescu regime stayed in power for a decade (1990-1996; 2000-2004) and not only blocked Romania’s democratic transition but pushed the country backward in time by at least half a century. In 1996, the democratic Constantinescu administration (1996-2000) came to power and gave people hope that Romania would begin its transition to democracy. However, Constantinescu was a great disappointment: he failed to make reforms, lost citizen support, and at the end of his mandate practically handed the presidency back to the former neo-communist President Iliescu. Finally, Băsescu claimed that his administration (2004-2014) had reformed the justice system when, in fact, he was perhaps the most deceitful of all post-communist Romanian presidents. Culian explains his view about Băsescu in an article titled “Grigore Luca Culian: Povestea cu votul diasporii e o manipulare grosolană” [Grigore Luca

---

¹ Ion Rațiu was Counsellor of the Romanian Legation in London during the Second World War. After the war, he remained in exile while communists took over power in Romania. Rațiu returned to Romania immediately after the revolution and strived to put the country on a path to democracy. Corneliu Coposu was a lawyer and important member of the National Peasants’ Party in the 1930s and 1940s. During communism, Coposu spent seventeen years in several high-security prisons and forced labor camps. After the revolution, both Rațiu and Coposu helped found the Christian-Democratic National Peasants’ Party. This was an opposition party which fought against the former communist nomenklatura and denounced its efforts to remain in power and stall the country’s democratic transition. Romanian immigrants and refugees view Rațiu and Coposu as two of the extremely few honest politicians of post-communist Romania.
Culian: Diaspora Vote Story Is Grossly Manipulative] published in the e-journal Occidentul Româneșc [Romanian West] on November 11, 2014. According to Culian, the biggest corruption cases were never brought to court by the Băsescu administration. Those who were put on trial and thrown in jail were either Băsescu’s political adversaries or lower rank politicians from the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the former Liberal Democratic Party (PLD). During our interview, Culian recalled a tense encounter with President Băsescu:

I told Băsescu, I supported you in the beginning but I have become one of your toughest critics. I cannot be bought by anybody. I am not an ATM machine; I take neither euros nor dollars—I’ll have none of that stuff. I run an independent newspaper which I founded on my own and I speak frankly and directly. He looked me in the eye and told me that he knows there are people who criticize him out of an honest intention to make things better. Băsescu doesn’t really value flatterers all that much. He knows that they would be the first to betray him if they saw a threat coming their way. They would run for dear life like scared rabbits. Băsescu is aware that besides these weaklings there are also free individuals who aren’t afraid to write about politics honestly and truthfully. (personal interview, March 12, 2011)

Given his critical view of all Romanian political regimes, Culian is in favor of the restoration of Romanian monarchy. According to him, if Romania had become a monarchy immediately after the revolution, the blind fight for power would have been eliminated and the country would have seen a smooth transition to democracy. This political choice implies detachment from all political ideologies and groups of interests vying for power in post-communist Romania.

---

1 In 2003, Traian Băsescu’s Democratic Party (PD) negotiated an alliance with the National Liberal Party (PNL) to ensure a strong opposition against Ion Iliescu’s neo-communist Social Democratic Party (PSD) in the parliamentary elections of 2004. In 2006, part of PNL split off and formed the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD) which eventually merged with PD in 2008.

2 In the 2004 presidential elections, Grigore Culian supported Traian Băsescu against neo-communist candidate Adrian Năstase. The majority of Romanian immigrants and refugees were pro-Băsescu at the time.
Culian also takes a politically independent stance on diaspora representation in the Romanian Parliament: he rejects party-affiliated candidates for diaspora seats and favors independents. Culian has repeatedly warned that candidates affiliated with political parties have an unfair advantage over independent candidates. To explain and protest this situation, he has published open letters and articles both in *New York Magazin* and in other traditional and online media. For instance, Culian published an open letter to the current Romanian President Klaus Iohannis in the e-journal *Radio Metafora* [Radio Metaphor] on February 19, 2015. Culian argued that party-affiliated candidates are not required by law to obtain signatures of support from Romanian émigré communities. This requirement only applies to independent candidates. Hence, “the electoral process is biased and results in diaspora representatives who know little about the communities they claim to represent or simply disregard their problems. Their greatest concern is to promote the interests of the political parties that put them in power.” In an article titled “Recomandarea noastră pentru alegerile prezidențiale de duminică, 2 noiembrie 2014: Spuneți NU minciunii și imposturii!” [Our Recommendation for the Presidential Elections on Sunday, November 2, 2014: Say NO to Lies and Fraud!] published in *New York Magazin* on October 23, 2014, Culian raised his voice against party-affiliated diaspora representatives in the Romanian Parliament: “The diaspora seats in the Romanian parliament are occupied by party activists who remain completely ignorant of the needs of our community.” Before the 2012 parliamentary elections, he urged his fellow émigrés to vote for an independent candidate rather than for Mircea Lubanovici, candidate of the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), or other party-affiliated candidates. In

The Romanian political elite is trying to deceive us again: they want to secure several comfortable seats in parliament for party members who have not been placed in political offices yet. This violates our right to be represented by people familiar with our needs and determined to address them. If we do not reject dishonest political maneuvers on December 9, 2012, the same party activists (i.e., Mircea Lubanovici and the like) are going to get the diaspora seats in parliament. We need to vote for an independent candidate (if indeed there will be one) or simply take our voting ballots and cross off all candidates affiliated with political parties (regardless of the parties to which they belong).

Briefly put, journalist Grigore Culian engages in politics from a politically independent position in order to avert suspicion and attacks from Romanian immigrants and refugees and maintain a loyal readership. He has criticized all political regimes of post-communist Romania and supports the restoration of Romanian monarchy as the only plausible guarantor of democracy. Culian also denounces party-affiliated diaspora representatives in the Romanian Parliament who, in his view, care less about the needs of émigré communities than about party interests, and favors independents.

6.5. Similar Patterns of Political (Dis)Engagement among Romanian Immigrants and Refugees

As specified in Chapter Two, there are two groups of Romanian émigrés: one group left Romania before or immediately after 1989 and acquired the status of political refugees in the United States, while the other group left Romania after 1989 and came to the United States as immigrants. How do these two groups of Romanians fare with respect to political (dis)engagement? Do Romanians who lived through the collapse of communism
and a period of democratic transition at home display different patterns of political (dis)engagement compared to Romanian political refugees who fled during political repression? Are they becoming more politically active? Are we seeing signs of improvement?

Most of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly Romanians who lived under communism well into their mature years. My fieldwork and interviews did not reveal any significant differences between these two groups’ patterns of political (dis)engagement. Most Romanian community leaders, whether they came to the United States before or after 1989, purposely avoid politics and steer their organizations away from political concerns. They know that politics breeds distrust, harsh criticisms, and arguments; it fragments an already disunited community and drives people away from churches and ethnic organizations. In this context, Romanian community leaders focus on apolitical activities and events that bring people together instead of driving them apart: ethnocultural festivals and celebrations involving traditional food, drink, and music, Romanian literature and art, Orthodox spirituality, and professional development.

However, there are rare exceptions. A few Romanian community leaders have adopted a different strategy of coping with contentious politics. They become engaged in politics but since they consider all politics repugnant, they do so from an independent position. Some denounced political repression under communism; others have taken issue with the corruption of the neo-communist political regimes that governed Romania after 1989. But what these politically active Romanians have in common is their determination to remain unaffiliated with any political party or interest group and support the restoration of
Romanian monarchy as the only trustworthy guarantor of democracy in their home country.

Given the low number of politically active Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, it is difficult to determine whether there might be any differences in political activity between Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants. As indicated above, out of a total of forty-two interviewees, political refugee Grigore Luca Culian, journalist and owner of *New York Magazin*, was the only community leader currently active in politics. Two other political refugees, Nicholas Dima, leader of the Truth about Romania Committee and Simona Maria Vrăbiescu Kleckner, founder of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Organization of Romanian Democracy (ACORD), wrote books of memoirs about their efforts to expose the abuses of communist and post-communist Romanian governments. Both Dima and Vrăbiescu Kleckner maintained their political independence by criticizing all Romanian political regimes and supporting the restoration of Romanian monarchy. However, they eventually withdrew from politics due to tension within the Romanian community and indifference on the part of American decision-makers. Among my immigrant interviewees, only one graduate student in his late twenties declared that he had participated in a political campaign aimed at preventing the corrupt Romanian government from allowing a gold mining company to begin operations in the Apuseni Mountains in Western Romania and destroy the natural environment. This student stated that he was politically independent. He criticized most politicians and political parties of post-communist Romania and expressed his support for the restoration of Romanian monarchy as the only viable solution for a democratic future. Thus, the few
politically active Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area do not appear to be concentrated either among political refugees or among immigrants.

What is certain, however, is that most Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants withdraw from politics. This finding may be due to the fact that for the most part, my research participants spent large sections of their lives under communism regardless of whether they came to the United States before or after 1989. Young Romanians in their late twenties and early thirties lived under communism for just a few years and left the country in early adulthood. These individuals rarely join Romanian churches and organizations. Of course, no definite statements can be made about young Romanian immigrants’ political activity based on the three interviews I was able to conduct. What is certain is that most young Romanian immigrants do not participate in the life of the ethnic community. Their political (dis)engagement would be an interesting research topic for a future study.

6.6. Conclusion

Chapter Six has shown how Romanian immigrants and refugees’ negative experiences and understandings of politics have led to low levels of political engagement in the United States. Section 6.2 reviewed their traumatic experiences of communist and post-communist Romanian politics and their disappointment with American politics. On one hand, intrusions of home country politics into the Romanian émigré community both before and after 1989 gave rise to mutual suspicion, political accusations, and heated arguments and eventually eroded community ties. On the other hand, American foreign policy toward Romania has been at best ambiguous and unhelpful and at worst
hypocritical and destructive. As a result, Romanian immigrants and refugees see politics as contentious. Section 6.3 discussed the most common strategy adopted by Romanian community leaders in response to contentious politics: political withdrawal. They avoid politics and steer their organizations away from political concerns focusing instead on apolitical activities and events which bring people together instead of driving them apart. Section 6.4 elaborated on a different and much rarer strategy of coping with contentious politics adopted by a few Romanian community leaders: political engagement from an independent position. Their political activity amounts to criticizing all political regimes that governed Romania before and after 1989 while remaining unaffiliated with any political parties or interest groups. Thus, they are able to maintain their reputation and avoid suspicions and attacks. Section 6.5 explained that with very few exceptions, Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants tend to withdraw from politics.
Conclusion

7.1. Dissertation Purpose and Main Findings

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of a group of Romanian immigrants and refugees who spent decades under Romanian communism before resettling in the United States. It articulates the processes through which their experience of political repression has led to political withdrawal in the United States.

Briefly put, Romanian immigrants and refugees have experienced both communist and post-communist Romanian politics as intrusive and destructive of community ties. Romanian politics reached beyond Romanian borders, infiltrated the émigré community in the United States, and gave rise to suspicions, political accusations, and arguments. Over time, these struggles eroded Romanian churches and organizations, as well as people’s sense of a shared civic life. Romanian immigrants and refugees have also experienced American foreign policy toward Romania as harmful and unresponsive to their needs: it has been driven by strategic and economic reasons rather than a genuine concern for democracy in the region. Thus, they have developed a negative understanding of politics. In their view, politics is deeply contentious. It is corrupt and invasive, and drives people apart instead of bringing them together to articulate common goals and work as a group to attain them.

As a result, most Romanian community leaders steer their churches and organizations away from political discussions and concerns. Romanian immigrants and refugees’ low rates of political integration are not simply due to their pre-migration socialization under communism and to their post-migration difficulties learning the ropes of democratic
politics, as the literature on immigration and political integration generally assumes.

Rather, Romanian immigrants and refugees continued struggling with non-democratic Romanian politics on U.S. territory, while at the same time being forced to face the ambiguity and harm of American foreign policy toward Romania. Most feel that they if they are to preserve any remnants of community life, they need to avoid the dangerous realm of politics and focus on “apolitical” (i.e., ethnocultural) activities and events instead. Only a few Romanian community leaders engage in politics, but even these persons do so from an “independent” position in order to avoid affiliation with political parties or interest groups.

In what follows, I show how each research objective specified in Chapter Two has been addressed by the chapters of the dissertation.

7.2. Addressing the Research Objectives

7.2.1. First research objective: Negative experiences and understandings of Romanian and American politics among Romanian immigrants and refugees

Chapter Five addressed the first research objective of this dissertation by exploring Romanian immigrants and refugees’ experiences and understandings of home and host country politics.

Specifically, Chapter Five discussed Romanian immigrants and refugees’ traumatic experiences of communist politics. The majority of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly individuals who spent their youth and much of their adulthood under communism and recall many instances of political intrusions into their lives prior to migration. These ranged from obligatory participation in staged events organized as part of Ceaușescu’s personality cult to censorship, verbal threats, termination of employment,
physical harassment, and imprisonment. Surprisingly, Romanian political refugees continued experiencing political repression even as they escaped the Soviet bloc and crossed over into the West. Their lives in the Western European refugee camps and the United States were deeply shaped by the Romanian communist regime. As my fieldwork and interviews indicate, Romanian political refugees felt fear and resentment upon realizing that the repressive apparatus of the Romanian Secret Police (the infamous Securitate) made efforts to infiltrate Romanian Orthodox churches and organizations in the United States, as well as institutions founded by the Romanian state on American territory such as embassies, consulates, and cultural centers. As a result, mutual suspicion grew among Romanians in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. Political accusations and fights broke out and led to community fragmentation.

A quarter century after the fall of communism, the vast majority of my research participants, whether they came to the United States before or after 1989, continue experiencing Romanian politics as intrusive and disruptive of community life. Most are convinced that Securitate agents who infiltrated their community during communism never left the U.S. and live among them. Moreover, they consider post-communist Romanian politics as equally corrupt and capable of meddling with their lives. Many Romanian community leaders in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area (e.g., Romanian Orthodox priests, Romanian organization leaders, political representatives of the diaspora in the Romanian Parliament, and employees of Romanian consulates and cultural centers) are suspected of collaboration with dishonest Romanian politicians in Bucharest. Worries run high and political accusations continue being thrown left and right. These conflicts
perpetuate the state of disunity in which the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area found itself when communism fell in December 1989.

As to American politics, Romanian immigrants and refugees have experienced it as more democratic than Romanian politics. According to them, it is less corrupt and intrusive and more connected to the grassroots. However, they also identify a problematic side to American politics. U.S. foreign policy toward communist and post-communist Romania has been naïve and ambiguous at best and hypocritical and destructive at worst. Before 1989, the United States supported Romanian president Nicolae Ceaușescu, one of the most repressive dictators of the former Soviet bloc, because he presented himself as a liberal head of state who was determined to remain independent from the Soviet Union. After 1989, the United States was quick to cut down on financial support for Romania’s free press and democratic institutions and promote its own economic interests in the region. Thus, it allowed the country to devolve from communism to neo-communism. In both cases, it was Romanian citizens and Romanian émigrés who suffered the consequences of non-democratic Romanian governments.

Romanian immigrants and refugees have developed a negative understanding of politics. They see both communist and post-communist Romanian politics as manipulative, intrusive, and destructive of community ties. For them, Romanian politics is also a top-down affair: it has been forced on people by corrupt non-democratic governments and all they have been able to do has been to suffer its effects in the home and host countries. Moreover, Romanian immigrants and refugees see American foreign policy toward Romania as detrimental and indifferent to their needs: strategic and
economic concerns have often prevailed over support for democracy in the region. Thus, for Romanians, politics is deeply contentious.

7.2.2. Second research objective: Fragmented community ties among Romanian immigrants and refugees

Romanian immigrants and refugees identify the intrusions of communist and post-communist Romanian politics as the primary cause of community fragmentation. Chapter Four focused on the phenomenon of community fragmentation and its manifestations among Romanian émigrés. In so doing, it addressed the second research objective of this dissertation by exploring Romanian immigrants and refugees’ patterns of civic (dis)engagement, i.e., their civic practices, modes of interaction, and shared understandings of community and civic activities.

Specifically, Chapter Four discussed the civic life of Romanian immigrants and refugees and the most difficult challenges it has encountered since the 1950s. To the extent that Romanian civic engagement exists in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, it revolves around Romanian Orthodox churches and ethnic organizations, as well as ethnic bakeries, cafés, restaurants, and social media sites. It includes activities such as Orthodox religious services, ethnic holidays and other celebrations such as dances, banquets, and festivals, and discussions on online forums.

However, many Romanian immigrants and refugees are reluctant to call these activities “civic engagement.” In fact, the majority of the people I met during fieldwork and interviews talked about disengagement as one of the greatest problems plaguing the Romanian community. Romanian immigrants and refugees rarely come together as a group to accomplish common goals. Collaborations are at best temporary (with many
ending in arguments and conflicts) and at worst impossible to forge. As a result, most organizations and community projects depend on the personal efforts of a few individuals who are sufficiently determined to work on their own to see them succeed. Since they can hardly count on their co-ethnics for membership dues, active participation in planning meetings and events, voluntary work, and donations, their initiatives remain unsustainable in the long term. Thus, Romanian civic activity is uneven. Organizations go through ups and downs and some even close doors or only continue to function as “ghost organizations” on paper when leaders step down and no one else is willing to replace them. Likewise, many community activities are organized irregularly or fail altogether.

Romanian immigrants and refugees deplore the fragmentation of their community. Indeed, disunity was the first thing most Romanians talked about when asked to describe their ethnic group. They are deeply distrustful of their own ability to work together to support successful organizations and carry out long-term community projects.

7.2.3. Third research objective: Romanian political refugees vs. Romanian immigrants. Similarities or differences?

As mentioned above, Romanians came to the U.S. in two groups: one group came as political refugees during communism (1945-1989/1990) and the other group came as immigrants after the collapse of communism (1989-present). Chapters Four and Five addressed the third research objective of this dissertation by exploring whether Romanian immigrants who lived through the collapse of communism and a period of democratic transition at home display different experiences and understandings of politics and different patterns of civic (dis)engagement compared to Romanian political refugees who
fled their home country during political repression. Put briefly, are we seeing signs of improvement? Have recent Romanian immigrants had more positive experiences of politics than Romanian political refugees? Have they developed more optimistic understandings of politics? Are the newer immigrants demonstrating more substantial civic engagement compared to their political refugee counterparts?

My fieldwork and interviews did not reveal any significant differences between these two groups’ experiences and understandings of politics. Most Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants felt the pressure of Romanian communism and remained deeply aware of the non-democratic tendencies and corruption of post-communist Romanian governments. As to American politics, Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants are at least partly disappointed by it, particularly by U.S. foreign relations with Romania before and after 1989. Thus, they have developed a negative view of politics and remain wary of top-down political intrusions in their lives.

Romanian immigrants and refugees are also similar in their patterns of civic (dis)engagement. Since political intrusions have eroded community ties, distrust runs high in the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. Consequently, neither Romanian political refugees nor Romanian immigrants cooperate well in planning and accomplishing community projects. Both groups display low rates of membership and participation in Romanian churches and organizations and are reluctant to do voluntary work and donate for community projects. Community leaders are rare and describe themselves as self-reliant. As a result, most Romanian political refugees and
Romanian immigrants see their community as disunited. They deplore their divisions but often feel powerless to effect change.

These findings may be due to the fact that most of my research participants are middle-aged and elderly Romanians who spent large sections of their lives under communism whether they came to the United States before or after 1989. Young Romanian immigrants currently in their late twenties and early thirties lived under communism for just a few years and left Romania in early adulthood. These individuals rarely participate in ethnic churches and organizations. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether they have had better experiences of politics or have developed more positive understandings of politics compared to middle-aged and elderly Romanians. The three Romanian youths I was able to find through Romanian student associations and interview were largely similar to their older counterparts. They are familiar with the political repression exerted by the former communist regime and worry about the corruption of post-communist Romanian governments. One of them saw monarchy as the only solution for a democratic Romania.

It is also difficult to determine where young Romanians stand on civic engagement compared to middle-aged and elderly Romanians. My fieldwork suggests that they may be less civically engaged than their older counterparts, at least within the Romanian community. They rarely become members of ethnic churches and organizations. Moreover, Romanian student associations in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area are short-lived. They generally survive for several years but cease their activity when leaders step down or graduate and no one else is willing to replace them. Finding young Romanians to
interview through ethnic churches, organizations, and student associations was a challenge. Most of my attempts to contact leaders and members of Romanian student associations at well-known universities in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area via phone calls and email messages proved unsuccessful. My visits to Romanian student associations also failed to yield the desired results. Eventually I was able to secure interviews with three young Romanians, one of whom was actually the daughter of a Romanian political refugee I had already interviewed. These are signs of civic disengagement. According to some of the Romanian Orthodox priests and organization leaders I met during fieldwork and interviews, many young Romanians are students who do not expect to spend much time in the same town or city, so they have fewer incentives to commit to churches and organizations over the long term. Also, they may be more interested in their studies and careers than in becoming active members of their ethnic community.

7.2.4. Tying up loose ends: Modes of political withdrawal among Romanian immigrants and refugees

Chapter Six linked the findings of this dissertation to the quantitative scholarly literature on the political withdrawal of immigrants from non-democratic countries. It also specified the modes of political withdrawal prevalent among Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area.

Since Romanian immigrants and refugees have experienced both communist and post-communist Romanian politics as corrupt, intrusive, and destructive of community ties and American politics as harmful and unresponsive to their needs, the majority withdraw from politics. Most Romanian community leaders, whether they came to the United
States before or after 1989, are not just indifferent to politics; they purposely steer their organizations away from political discussions and concerns. “We don’t do politics here” was a statement I heard often during my fieldwork and interviews. Romanian community leaders organize apolitical activities and events that tend to unite rather than divide people: ethnocultural festivals and celebrations, Romanian literature and art, Orthodox spirituality, and professional development.

Of course, there are rare exceptions. A few Romanian community leaders have become engaged in politics but since all politics is contentious, they do so from an independent position. Some fought against political repression under communism; others have exposed the non-democratic tendencies and corruption of post-communist Romanian political regimes. But what they share is their political independence: the majority are critical of all Romanian politicians and interest groups and remain unaffiliated with any political party. Most of them also support the restoration of Romanian monarchy as the only solution for a democratic Romania.

7.3. Implications for Theory and Practice

This dissertation contributes to theory-building in the area of political integration among immigrants from non-democratic countries. As specified above, the dissertation articulates the processes through which the experience of political repression undergone by Romanian immigrants and refugees has led to political withdrawal in the United States. The ethnographic method was crucial to this study. Quantitative studies support the correlation between immigrants’ background in non-democratic home countries and their political withdrawal in host countries. However, these studies do not tell us much
about what happens ‘in between:’ How do immigrants from non-democratic countries carry over their experience of political repression into the host society? How does this experience lower the likelihood of their political participation? Immersion in the civic and political world of Romanian immigrants and refugees and close person-to-person contact enabled me to understand their experiences of politics and community and the meanings they assign to these experiences. The narrative I have put together based on their insights reveals the processes linking these experiences of penetrated and fragmented public life with political withdrawal in the United States.

In addition, the dissertation challenges two important assumptions of the scholarship on immigrant civic and political integration. First, existing scholarship assumes that the experience of repressive politics undergone by immigrants from non-democratic regimes is confined to the home country. A widely accepted scenario unfolds as follows. Immigrants from non-democratic countries are subjected to political repression at home and, as a result, acquire a set of non-democratic attitudes, beliefs, and values. When they escape to the free world, they bring these non-democratic attitudes, beliefs, and values with them and, therefore, have difficulties integrating into their new polities. However, over time, they undergo a process of resocialization into the civic and political practices of democracy. While this scenario may be partly true, it does not help explain why immigrants from non-democratic countries take so long to become politically integrated compared to other immigrants and the native-born. Their low rates of political activity decades after resettlement require further research.
This dissertation shows that the assumption of a stark break between immigrants’ pre-migration experience of non-democratic politics and their post-migration experience of democratic politics may be unsound. Surprisingly, Romanian immigrants and refugees witnessed non-democratic Romanian politics reaching beyond Romanian borders and infiltrating their community in the United States both before and after 1989. During communism, political intrusions stirred up suspicion, political accusations, and scandals, and turned Romanians against Romanians. After the collapse of communism, the Romanian diaspora began influencing home country politics through voting, particularly when it feared the return of neo-communists to power. As a result, Romanian politicians, political parties, and interest groups continued meddling with the life of Romanian émigrés in order to gain political advantage. Moreover, Romanian immigrants and refugees have been forced to acknowledge the fact that American politics does not always conform to democratic principles either, particularly when strategic and economic benefits come into play. This perceived experience of non-democratic politics within the United States explains why Romanian immigrants and refugees still lag behind on political integration decades after resettlement. It is not just that they have been held back by the non-democratic attitudes, beliefs, and values they carried over from the old country. Rather, they have never truly escaped the political control exerted by non-democratic Romanian governments, political parties, and interest groups. At the same time, they have been unable to turn to the American political system for help because they do not consider it to be fully democratic and responsive to their needs either. Thus, for Romanian immigrants and refugees, there are no clear-cut boundaries between non-
democratic politics and democratic politics. This blurriness has generated confusion, resentment, and disappointment, and ultimately led to political withdrawal.

Second, existing scholarship on immigrant civic and political integration assumes that the number of immigrant organizations is a good indicator of immigrant civic integration. The more organizations immigrants create in the host country, the more vibrant and civically active their community is considered to be. However, this dissertation shows that this assumption may not be entirely sound. In the case of Romanian immigrants and refugees, the number of ethnic churches and organizations is not necessarily a sign of a healthy and active immigrant community; it is a sign of disunity. My research participants offered a surprising explanation for the existence of several Romanian Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. According to them, before 1989 Romanian political refugees would work hard to buy or build a church only to end up with a priest sent over by the Romanian Patriarchate in Bucharest. Suspicions of infiltration by the Romanian communist regime would begin circulating among parish members and many would leave that particular church and found another one, only to confront a similar situation later on. Briefly put, Romanian political refugees’ efforts to escape political control led to church multiplication. Currently, both Romanian political refugees and Romanian immigrants deplore the fact that there are several Romanian Orthodox churches in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. They do not see themselves as a thriving community of faith in need of multiple churches to cultivate their spiritual growth. Rather, they see themselves as a suspicious, weak, and scattered group of people who have not managed to come together and build a single strong church.
Moreover, this dissertation challenges an important finding of the literature on immigration and political integration, namely that “community organizations offer assistance and actively nudge immigrants and refugees toward political integration” (Bloemraad 2006, 161). This does not apply to Romanians. Since Romanian community leaders actively discourage a focus on politics, the Romanian community and Romanian churches and organizations cannot function as grounds for the integration of Romanian immigrants and refugees into the practices of democratic politics.

Besides theory-building, this dissertation may also contribute to policy-making and activism. Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area are distrustful of both Romanian and American politics and often see themselves as a failed community. These negative views are widely circulated within their ethnic group and organizations and make it difficult for them to become civically and politically engaged. If U.S. policy-makers and activists want to help Romanian immigrants and refugees become civically and politically engaged, they may need to encourage them to move beyond their ethnic group and open up to the broader civil society. Participation in mainstream churches and civic organizations could enable them to break out of the vicious circle of struggling with corrupt non-democratic politics and gradually gain more confidence in the civic and political life of the United States.

7.4. Limitations

One limitation of this dissertation stems from the choice of the group of Romanians under study. The dissertation focuses on Romanian immigrants and refugees who are visible within the Romanian community in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area, particularly in
ethnic churches and organizations and at community activities and events. It reveals their struggles with political intrusions which have left their community in a state of disarray and ultimately led to political withdrawal. However, the dissertation does not look at Romanian immigrants and refugees who stay away from the Romanian community and participate in mainstream civic and political organizations instead. Perhaps these Romanians have managed to escape the negative civic and political experiences undergone by their counterparts within the émigré community and assign more hopeful meanings to the world of civic and political activity. Engagement in the mainstream churches, organizations, and community activities and events of the broader American society might render them more willing to participate in U.S. politics.

The second limitation of this dissertation is inherent in the use of ethnography. The dissertation explored the civic and political world of Romanian immigrants and refugees in the NY-NJ-PA metropolitan area. It yielded a rich narrative of their traumatic experience of political repression and community fragmentation leading to political withdrawal in the United States. However, it is unclear whether and to what extent these findings apply to other groups of immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries.

7.5. Further Research

Further research is necessary to look at Romanian immigrants and refugees who exit their ethnic community. Do these immigrants and refugees participate in the mainstream churches, organizations, and civic activities and events of the broader American society? Have they had more encouraging experiences of politics and community life than those
who stayed within the ethnic community? Do they assign more positive meanings to the world of civic and political activity? Are they more willing to engage in American politics? Answering these questions would help scholars, policy-makers, and activists figure out how to help Romanian immigrants and refugees move beyond their distrust of politics and hopeless perception of community life and make their voices heard on the American political scene.

Further research is also necessary to explore whether and to what extent the findings of this dissertation apply to other communities of immigrants and refugees from non-democratic countries. Such studies would contribute to building more substantial and refined theories about the political integration of these vulnerable groups of immigrants and refugees and helping them become civically and politically integrated in their host societies.
Dear Romanians,

My name is Alina Vamanu and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey (New Brunswick, NJ), under the guidance of my faculty advisor Jan Kubik, an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at Rutgers University. Currently, I am gathering material for my doctoral dissertation.

**Study objectives**

My dissertation focuses on the Romanian community in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. It explores Romanians’ participation in Romanian churches, organizations, and other activities and events, as well as in Romanian and American politics.

**Conditions for participation**

If you have been involved in the activities of Romanian churches or organizations (e.g., student associations, cultural or professional associations, charity organizations) as a leader or regular member, or in other community activities or events, and would like to contribute to this study, I invite you to participate. At the commencement of the study, you need to have lived for at least five years in the states of New York, New Jersey, or Philadelphia.
Interview procedure

You will be interviewed for 60-90 minutes. Interviews can take place in person, over the phone, or online, depending on your time and preferences. Of course, you will be given a Consent Form to sign, as a way to protect your right to confidentiality as a participant in this study.

Timeframe

We can do the interviews whenever you have time, starting May 2010.

If you would like to participate

Please contact me at: Email: alvamanu [at] rci.rutgers.edu; Phone: 732-648-1690

Thank you very much in advance for your kind help!
Drăgii români,

Mă numesc Alina Vamanu și sunt doctorandă la Facultatea de Științe Politice a Universității Rutgers a Statului New Jersey (New Brunswick, NJ) sub îndrumarea Profesorului Universitar Dr. Jan Kubik. În prezent, adun material pentru teza de doctorat.

**Obiectivele studiului**

Teza mea de dizertație are în vedere comunitatea românească din statele New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Își propune să exploreze participarea românilor la biserici, organizații și activități sau evenimente comunitare românești, precum și implicarea acestora în politica românească și americană.

**Condiții pentru participare**

Dacă sunteți lider ori membru al vreunei biserici sau organizații românești din zona în care locuiți (de exemplu, asociații studențești, asociații culturale, organizații profesionale, fundații de caritate), ori daca v-ați implicat în orice alt mod în activitatea acestora sau în alte activități și evenimente comunitare și doriți să contribuiți la acest studiu, vă invit să participați. O condiție este ca, la începerea studiului, să fi locuit timp de cel puțin cinci ani într-unul din statele New York, New Jersey, sau Philadelphia.
Procedura de interviu

Veți fi intervievat(ă) timp de 60-90 de minute. Interviurile se pot desfășura în persoană, la telefon sau online, în funcție de timpul și preferințele dumneavoastră. Bineînțeles, veți primi spre semnare un Formular de Consimțămînt menit a vă proteja dreptul de confidențialitate ca participant(ă) la acest studiu.

Interval de timp

Putem face interviurile oricând aveți timp, începînd cu luna mai 2010.

Dacă doriți să participați

Vă rog să mă contactați la: Email: alvamanu [at] rci.rutgers.edu; Telefon: 732-648-1690

Vă mulțumesc mult pentru ajutor!
Appendix C: Interview Guide I. Organization Members (English)

CLUSTER ONE: CIVIC PRACTICES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF CIVIC LIFE AMONG MEMBERS OF ROMANIAN CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

1. When did you settle in New York/New Jersey/Pennsylvania? What was your life like in the beginning? Did you get help from Romanians in the area?

2. You are a member of [name of Romanian church or organization]. How did you become involved in this church/organization?

3. What is the goal of your church/organization? What kinds of activities and events does it organize?

4. What are your responsibilities within this church/organization? Have you contributed to any activities/events organized by your church/organization? How would you describe them to me? How did you contribute, specifically?

5. Are you aware of other activities/events organized by the Romanian community in your area? Have you contributed to any of these activities/events? How would you describe them to me? How did you contribute, specifically?

6. What motivates you to contribute to your church/organization and the broader Romanian community in your area? Why are these contributions important to you?

7. Who else contributes to activities/events organized by your church/organization and the broader Romanian community in your area? What is it like to work with these persons? Can you give me a specific example?

8. How would you describe the Romanian community in your area?
CLUSTER TWO: EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOME AND HOST COUNTRY POLITICS AMONG MEMBERS OF ROMANIAN CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

1. Do you remember your life under Romanian communism? How would you describe it? What was the Romanian communist political regime like? How did it affect you?

2. When did you leave communist/post-communist Romania? What motivated you to leave the country? How did you escape/emigrate?


4. What role has Romanian politics played in your life? Have you been involved in Romanian politics?

5. What Romanian political events/figures/interest groups have caught your attention? Why do you consider them important?


7. What role has American politics played in your life? Have you been involved in American politics?

8. What American political events/figures/interest groups have caught your attention? Why do you consider them important?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (IF IT HAS NOT EMERGED IN THE COURSE OF THE INTERVIEW)

Name: _____________________

Age: _______________________

Gender: ____________________
Education: _____________________
Marital status: ________________
Income: _______________________
Occupation: __________________

CONCLUSION

Finally, are there any issues I haven’t touched upon that you would like to tell me about?

Please feel free to share with me anything you consider important.
Appendix D: Chestionar de interviu I. Membri de organizații
[Interview Guide I. Organization Members (Romanian)]

PRIMA SERIE: PRACTICI CIVICE ȘI PERCEPTII ALE VIEȚII ÎN COMUNITATE PRINTRE MEMBRII BISERICILOR ȘI ORGANIZAȚIILOR ROMÂNEȘTI


2. Sunteți membru al [numele bisericii/organizației civice]. Cum ați ajuns să vă implicați în această biserică/organizație?

3. Care sunt țelurile bisericii/organizației din care faceți parte? Ce tipuri de activități și evenimente se organizează în cadrul ei?


6. Ce vă motivează să vă implicați în activitatea bisericii/organizației din care faceți parte, precum și în viața comunității românești mai largi? În ce sens sunt aceste contribuții importante pentru dumneavoastră?
7. Cine se mai implică în activitatea bisericii/organizației din care faceți parte și în viața comunității românești mai largi? Cum cooperați cu aceste persoane? Ați putea să-mi dați un exemplu concret?

8. Cum ați descrie comunitatea românească din zona în care locuiți?

A DOUA SERIE: EXPERIENȚE ȘI PERCEPȚII ALE POLITICII DIN ȚARA DE ORIGINE ȘI ȚARA DE ADOPTIE PRINTRE MEMBRII BISERICILOR ȘI ORGANIZAȚIILOR ROMÂNEȘTI

1. Vă amintiți cum era viața în comunismul românesc? Cum ați descri-o? Cum ați descrie regimul politic comunist românesc? Cum v-a afectat el?

2. Când ați plecat din România comunistă/post-comunistă? Ce anume v-a motivat să plecați din țară? Cum ați fugit/emigrat?


4. Ce rol a jucat politica românească în viața dumneavoastră? V-ați implicat vreodată în politica românească?

5. Ce evenimente/personalități/grupuri de interes politice românești v-au reținut atenția? De ce le considerați importante?


7. Ce rol a jucat politica americană în viața dumneavoastră? V-ați implicat vreodată în politica americană?

8. Ce evenimente/personalități/grupuri de interes politice americane v-au reținut atenția? De ce le considerați importante?
DATE DEMOGRAFICE (DACĂ NU AU REIEȘIT ÎN CURSUL INTERVIULUI)

Nume: _____________________

Vârstă: _____________________

Sex: _____________________

Educație: _____________________

Stare civilă: __________

Venit: _____________________

Ocupație: _____________________

CONCLUZIE

Acum, la final, vă rog să îmi spună dacă este vreo chestiune pe care nu am atins-o și despre care ați dori să discutați. M-ar interesa să aflu orice considerați dumneavoastră că ar fi important.
Appendix E: Interview Guide II. Organization Leaders (English)

CLUSTER ONE: CIVIC PRACTICES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF CIVIC LIFE AMONG LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF ROMANIAN CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

1. When did you settle in New York/New Jersey/Pennsylvania? What was your life like in the beginning? Did you get help from Romanians in the area?
2. You are the priest/president of [name of Romanian church or organization]. How did you become involved in this church/organization? What motivated you to take up this leadership position? Why is leadership important to you?
3. What is the goal of your church/organization? How many members does it have? What kinds of activities and events does it organize?
4. How do church/organization members contribute to your church/organization and the activities/events it organizes? How do you mobilize them? What is it like to work with them? Could you give me a specific example?
5. Are you aware of any other activities/events organized by the Romanian community in your area? Do you and/or the members of your church/organization contribute to any of these activities/events? How would you describe these contributions?
6. How would you describe the Romanian community in your area?

CLUSTER TWO: EXPERIENCES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOME AND HOST COUNTRY POLITICS AMONG LEADERS AND MEMBERS OF ROMANIAN CHURCHES AND ORGANIZATIONS

1. Do you remember your life under Romanian communism? How would you describe it? What was the Romanian communist political regime like? How did it affect you?
2. When did you leave communist/post-communist Romania? What motivated you to leave the country? How did you escape/emigrate?


4. What role has Romanian politics played in your life? Have you been involved in Romanian politics? Has your church/organization been involved in Romanian politics?

5. What Romanian political events/figures/interest groups have caught your attention? Why do you consider them important?


7. What role has American politics played in your life? Have you been involved in American politics? Has your church/organization been involved in American politics?

8. What American political events/figures/interest groups have caught your attention? Why do you consider them important?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION (IF IT HAS NOT EMERGED IN THE COURSE OF THE INTERVIEW)

Name: _____________________

Age: _______________________

Gender: ____________________

Education: ___________________

Marital status: ________________
Income: ______________________

Occupation: ____________________

CONCLUSION

Finally, are there any issues I haven’t touched upon that you would like to tell me about?

Please feel free to share with me anything you consider important.
Appendix F: Chestionar de interviu II. Lideri de organizații
[Interview Guide II. Organization Leaders (Romanian)]

PRIMA SERIE: PRACTICI CIVICE ȘI PERCEPȚII ALE VIEȚII ÎN COMUNITATE PRINTRE LIDERII ȘI MEMBRII BISERICILOR ȘI ORGANIZAȚIILOR ROMÂNEȘTI


2. Sunteți preotul/președintele [numele bisericii/organizației civice]. Cum ați ajuns să vă implicați în această biserică/organizație? Ce anume v-a motivat să deveniți preot aici/să preluai conducerea organizației? De ce e importante pentru dumneavoastră funcția pe care o dețineți?

3. Care sunt țelurile bisericii/organizației dumneavoastră? Cîți membri are ea? Ce tipuri de activități și evenimente se organizează în cadrul ei?


5. Cunoașteți alte activități/evenimente organizate de comunitatea românească din zona în care locuiți? Contribuie membrii bisericii/organizației dumneavoastră la astfel de activități/evenimente? Cum ați descrie contribuțiile lor?

6. Cum ați descrie comunitatea românească din zona în care locuiți?
EXPERIENȚE ȘI PERCEPȚII ALE POLITICII DIN ȚARA DE ORIGINE ȘI ȚARA DE ADOPTIE PRINTRE LIDERII ȘI MEMBRII BISERICILOR ȘI ORGANIZAȚIILOR ROMÂNEȘTI

1. Vă amintiți cum era viața în comunismul românesc? Cum ati descri-o? Cum ați descrie regimul politic comunist românesc? Cum v-a afectat?

2. Când ați plecat din România comunistă/post-comunistă? Ce anume v-a motivat să plecați din țară? Cum ați fugit/emigrat?


4. Ce rol a jucat politica românească în viața dumneavoastră? V-ați implicat vreodată în politica românească? Dar biserică/organizația dumneavoastră, a fost ea implicată în politica românească?

5. Ce evenimente/personalități/grupuri de interes politice românești v-au reținut atenția? De ce le considerați importante?


7. Ce rol a jucat politica americană în viața dumneavoastră? V-ați implicat vreodată în politica americană? Dar biserică/organizația dumneavoastră, a fost ea implicată în politica americană?

8. Ce evenimente/personalități/grupuri de interes politice americane v-au reținut atenția? De ce le considerați importante?

DATE DEMOGRAFICE (DACĂ NU AU REIEȘIT ÎN CURSUL INTERVIULUI)

Nume: ______________________

Vîrstă: ______________________
Sex: ____________________
Educație: __________________
Stare civilă: ________________
Vent: ________________
Ocupație: __________________

CONCLUZIE

Acum, la final, vă rog să îmi spuneți dacă este vreo chestiune pe care nu am atins-o și despre care ați dori să discutăm. M-ar interesa să afli orice considerați dumneavoastră că ar fi important.
References

Primary sources


Pleșea, Gabriel. 1999. Corespondențe din New York: reportaje, comentarii, opinii,
atitudini din perioada de tranziție [New York Correspondence: Reports, Commentary, and Opinion Pieces from the Transition Period]. București: Editura Vestala.


Secondary sources


Gillet, Olivier. 1997. Religion et nationalisme: L'idéologie de l'Église orthodoxe roumaine sous le régime communiste [Religion and Nationalism: The Ideology of
the Romanian Orthodox Church under the Communist Regime]. Bruxelles: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles.


http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=901


