ACQUIESCENCE EFFECTS IN MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS: THE CASE OF ROMANIA*

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This papers tests for acquiescence effects on the attitudes towards immigrants. We employ the case of Romania, a country with very little incoming migration, but with an important outgoing flow. This makes the respondents less exposed to interaction with immigrants, but with a high probability to know emigrants, and to have emigrants in the immediate social network and/or kinship. Due to the lack of interaction with immigrants, we expected to discover significant impact of acquiescence on attitudes towards immigrants. This is supported with empirical evidences, using the Romanian EVS 2008 data and OLS models. We also show out that the net acquiescence score performs best in such models, overcoming the utility of other indicators of acquiescence.

***Keywords**: acquiescence, attitudes towards immigrants, Romania, EVS 2008, cross-country comparisons.*

Concerns with quality of data already have a long tradition in social sciences, which may be tracked back at least by mid-twentieth century (Johnson et al., 2005). Particularly when collecting information on attitudes, opinions, or values various types of errors may arrive. They may reflect the quality of the interview protocol – many times reflected by response sets, the biases induced by interviewers, as well as the response styles specific to respondents. The latter is in the focus of this paper. We are interested in acquiescence effects and search for a way to adequately assess such effects in the case of measuring attitudes towards immigrants, in the case of Romania.

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Measuring attitudes towards immigrants might be a tricky task, in the case of an emigration country, such as Romania. In the past two decades, outmigration decreased Romanian population probably by more than a tenth of its size (in 2008, according to Sandu and Alexandru, 2009: 288, 2.8 million Romanians were living outside the country. In the same year, the total population of Romania estimated by the National Institute of Statistics was 21.5 million). Incoming international migration in this period was rather scarce, including isolated cases, except maybe for the Moldavian settling down in Romania, which due to historical reasons may be seen as an internal migration. The economic growth has just started to bring the issue of labour force in-migration in the forefront of public debate, when it was hampered down by the global recession (Şerban and Lăzărescu, forthcoming). Therefore, the topic never became salient on the public agenda, and might be irrelevant for most of the population. That would make the measurement of attitudes towards migrants prone to acquiescence. On the other hand, the large outgoing migration may trigger another type of interest towards immigration, seen from the complementary perspective of the emigrant friends and relatives.

Our aim is to test if measuring attitudes towards immigrants (ATI) is subject to acquiescent response style (ARS) effects, in the Romanian context. For this, we use the Romanian dataset resulted from the 2008 wave of the European Values Study. We compute various indicators of acquiescence, which should give a view of the tendency to positively answer to questionnaire items irrespective of their content. Then we design competitive models for predicting ATI. Each model includes the usual determinants for the attitudes towards immigrants and one of the ARS indicators that we have computed.

Comparing the findings for each model, we conclude that there is indeed a tendency that acquiescence influences the measuring of ATI, and that the net acquiescent score is the most reliable ARS indicator for our purposes. We contribute to existing literature mainly by comparing various methods to assess acquiescence, and by applying all these to the case of attitudes towards immigrants. To the best of our knowledge, this is the only similar attempt in the field.

The paper starts with reviewing the literature devoted to acquiescence. First, we place ARS in the general context of response styles. Then we define acquiescence and present existing literature, showing how ARS was previously measured, how they tried to control for its effects, and how it differently manifests depending on the type of item, particularly for ratings, rankings, and forced choices. Attitudes towards immigrants are the second important field of our analyses. A section reviews the existing literature about the most important individual-level predictors. Then we use all these sources to reaffirm our objectives, which are later transposed into the section that introduces data and methodology. The description of findings shows how much ATI are affected by ARS, in Romania. The conclusive part discusses the implications for further research, for measuring ARS and for assessing the levels of ATI.

RESPONSE STYLES AS TYPES OF BIAS IN DATA COLLECTING

The interest in sources of error in what concerns the measurement of quantitative data has developed proportionally with the amount of data collected through, as well as with the development of methods used in analyzing it. Thus, it became salient after the Second World War (Johnson et al., 2005). Good quality indicators are supposed to reflect, in a reliable manner, the phenomenon that they intend to measure. However, variance in data is also caused by other factors than the substantive or content-related ones, such as the response styles of the individuals. They should be distinguished from response sets. The latter are usually unstable and depend on the temporary situation of the interview, as well as on contextual factors. Response styles are more stable sets, thus denoting a tendency of the individuals (Hui and Triandis, 1985, Herk et al., 2004). Independently of the content of the question, three main categories of tendencies can be observed: 1) giving middle point answers on scaled items, 2) giving extreme answers (not a pattern of agreements or disagreements), and 3) the one in which people position themselves either in agreement or in disagreement with items.

Response sets and response styles are a major source of bias, and their effects are most transparent when it comes to panel researches or cross-national ones, because they can alter the ranking of different groups on the items in question. This is why scholars have been interested in isolating the effects of the response sets and in developing strategies of taking them into account when analyzing data. The response sets can interfere with the accuracy of the responses, by modifying their positioning on the measurement tools in either directions; this may be triggered, for instance, by exaggerating the responses positively or negatively, or by clustering the frequency distributions around the middle points of the scales (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001). Thus, response styles can make it difficult for the proper measurement of dimensions to be realized, and for the researchers to verify whether a model explains the reality or not.

WHAT IS ACQUIESCENCE?

Acquiescence or acquiescent response style (ARS) is also known as the agreement tendency or 'yea-saying' (Herk et al., 2004). This is a specific type of extreme response style, given by the propensity of individuals to agree or to offer extreme positive answers, as opposed to disacquiescence response style (DRS), which refers to the tendency to disagree or to offer extreme negative answers (Watson, 1992, Harzing, 2006). The acquiescent response style is prominent in surveys using *Likert* scales, based on rating responses, and has been researched in various fields, such as political studies (Billiet et al., 2003, Engle, 2010), public health (Baron-Epel et al., 2010), marketing and economy (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001) and social studies (Watson, 1992, Smith, 2004, 2011). A review

of the literature on acquiescence clearly reveals the fact that this bias is a major concern for researchers in psychology, Smith (2004) pointing out that ARS is a dimension most often taken into consideration by studies on personality traits.

The literature on acquiescence points out several dilemmas related to identifying ARS. The most basic discussion refers to whether acquiescence should be regarded as a relevant bias or not – should one give importance to this type of response style and try to control for it, or it does not interfere with the research goals in a meaningful manner (Watson, 1992)? Also, there is debate on whether acquiescence should simply be considered as generating measurement error or not. Interested in aspects related to communication research, Smith (2004) argues for the need to isolate acquiescence in cross-national surveys, as underlying cultural variance depending on the diversity of national contexts and intergroup relations.

In what concerns the determinants of acquiescence and the possible levels of analysis, two main directions emerged: individual level and group/ aggregate/ national level. While individual determinants of acquiescence are mainly age and education level, the national determinants are culturally characteristic traits (Billiet et al., 2003; Smith, 2004, 2011; Davis et al., 2010).

The characteristics of the individual play a part in how answers to a questionnaire are provided. Age, gender, the level of education, income and status are all possible variables in how individuals tend to respond. Also, there are group level dimensions that can interfere with how replies to a questionnaire are structured: a range of factors, from social integration aspects, communication styles, and cultural traits to political and economic changes can be determinant factors in specific tendencies of answering. A third category of factors is the situational one, comprising the design of the research instruments (the wording of the questions, their order, etc.) and the characteristics of the interaction between the interviewer and the respondent.

Age influences the answering predisposition of the individuals, and can trigger ARS, since the conformism tendency increases along with age (Mirowsky and Ross, 1991). Further on, less educated people are generally more prone to ARS, as compared to more educated people because their knowledge horizons are narrower and, thus, there are more items that potentially refer to things unknown to them (Mirowsky and Ross, 1991, Presser and Schuman, 1980, Rammstedt et al., 2010). As for income levels and status, they are known to correlate with the level of education, and can, thus, indirectly influence the degree to which people give ARS answers. However, status comes with social visibility, and this may, in turn, lead to the tendency to give socially desirable answers.

Acquiescence, as a response style, is a particular type of non-content related systematic error (Billiet and Davidov, 2008). In their paper, the authors are testing for the stability of acquiescence across a four year period (1995 to 1999), using Belgian electoral data. As individual level determinants of acquiescence, they mention age (positive correlation) and education (negative correlation). On perceived

ethnic threats and distrust in politics as content themes, they present their final finding: acquiescence (tested using structural equation modelling, as a factor) is variable among individuals and it shows stability in time.

Harzing (2006) discusses response style problems, including the concept of acquiescence, by underlying cross-national differences in such responses. In doing so, she emphasizes how cultural differences, namely power distance, collectivism and uncertainty avoidance influence the response style, drawing on Hofstede's previous work. A typology of factors that account for variations in response styles is proposed: situational factors (for example, the wording of the questions, and the moment of the interview) and dispositional factors (characteristics of the individuals, such as age, and education level), which are in fact explored by the author in her inquiry. While extreme response style and middle response style are best predicted by language, acquiescence proves to be determined by collectivism (institutional collectivism practices), and no strong evidence was found to sustain the influence of power distance and uncertainty avoidance.

Among the values discussed by scholars in terms of their ability of predicting acquiescence are Hofstede's (collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance and femininity), Trompenaars', Schwartz's and GLOBE 'should be' and 'as is' dimensions (Smith, 2004). Smith (2011) is focused on cultural differences and communication styles and uses national level data not by aggregating individual indicators, but by constructing indexes of style of response for various types of questions. Starting with a categorization of four types of national cultures given the response styles of the individuals (moderate, consensus, dissent and extremity culture), he controls for acquiescence in analyzing Word Value Survey data. He links citizen response style with national response style and his results show that the individualism-collectivism cultural opposites are not necessarily influential and argue for the ipsatization of the data. The standard ipsatization procedure proposes two simple steps (Fisher, 2004; Hicks, 1970; Hofstede, 1980): first one computes the mean of all considered variables for a certain respondent. Then, for each variable, the resulting mean is subtracted from the actually observed value. In our opinion, the main disadvantage of the method is that it can be properly employed only when all the items supposed to be affected by response styles use scales with the same range.

Discussing about national response-styles leads to the larger debate around contextual determinants of acquiescence. Existing literature points out that both country level wide-spread attitudes and other cultural characteristics such as Hofstede's social values dimensions are to be considered when assessing response styles.

The interaction of situational and dispositional factors in accounting for acquiescence also received attention (Harzing, 2006; Engle, 2010). Engle (2010) addresses the response to a certain question, in a given situation, as a combination between the tendency to agree and content related elements specific to the

question[1]. While respondents generally have a tendency to endorse agreement, its extent is a function of personal traits and question characteristics. For instance, considering institutional confidence, ARS seems to be positively related to the overall confidence agreement given by the societal representation upon the respective institution. As a response style, acquiescence is also a function of the partisan nature of the object that it refers to. This can be translated into the capacity of finding reasons to disagree.

Based on the comparison between two cultural groups (Jews and Arabs) in what concerns response biases (extreme responses and acquiescence), Baron-Epel et al. (2010) analyzed attitudes towards health related topics, such as smoking, teeth brushing and flossing. They found out that the extreme response style generally varies along with the knowledge of the individuals in what concerns the topic being studied, and it is not characterized by inter-item stability. Ethnicity, age and education where indicated as covariates for the ARS. Findings also showed that the level of education is in a negative relation with ERB (extreme response bias), which increases as age increases. Also, they found that the ERB rate was higher among Arabs than among Jews, controlling for all the other variables. This is convergent to the idea that acquiescence is a fact that is often treated as an expression of cultural differences in what concerns styles of communication. The results of Baron-Epel et al. (2010) may also lead to the hypothesis that it might be useful for measuring ARS to consider not all attitude questions in the questionnaire, but only those items for which there are a large majority of positive attitudes within the population.

While exploring extreme response styles (ERS) and ARS, Johnson et al. (2011) examine the effects of Hofstede's cultural traits at country level, by means of hierarchical linear modelling. The relation between these cultural orientations and individuals' response styles is of concern. Their findings show that, while ERS is associated with masculinity and power distance, all four dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance) account for ARS.

Even though discussions about cultural patterns and types of cultures might stand under the premise that cultures are homogenous in their constitution and that individuals pertaining to the same culture are, in fact, similar, studies have shown that there are intracultural variations which are manifest when it comes to acquiescence. Lamm and Keller (2007) investigated the association between different styles of parenting (based on independence, interdependence and autonomous relatedness) and response sets. They found out that response styles vary along with intracultural differences. Actually, this is a specific application of the guideline idea that response styles, as individual characteristics, are influenced by macro level factors (cultural patterns and models).

[1] For more discussions about the intersection of dispositional and situational factors and about types of response sets, such as noncontingent responding or response range, see also Baumgarter and Steenkamp, 2001.

Davis et al. (2010) also look into the linkage between individual responses to survey items and the cultural characteristics of the groups. They namely consider the connection between ERS, ARS and acculturation, based on data produced by Mexican American respondents. Their findings indicate a multiple causality, including both cultural and individual determinants of response styles.

While debates on the relevance of considering acquiescence bias when analyzing data continue, the concept can be approached in several ways, and these turn into distinct ways of measuring acquiescence and controlling for it.

HOW TO MEASURE ACQUIESCENCE

As a sign of inconsistency, given by the agreement with a statement and also with its opposite, acquiescent responses go against the usually constant latent traits that are being measured, such as preferences, values or attitudes (van de Velden, 2007; Billiet and Davidov, 2008; Locke and Baik, 2009).

The basic way in which acquiescence can be accounted for in dealing with quantitative data is by using balanced scales, meaning that including both negatively worded and positively worded statements can reveal how present acquiescence is. In analyzing the data, scholars may correlate the answers given to such items. If the correlation between the two sets of answers is positive, one may conclude that acquiescence effects are present. The size of the correlation gives a basic measurement of acquiescence. When this relationship is negative, acquiescence can most often be left out of the picture (Smith, 2004).

One helpful aspect to be kept in mind with regards to measuring acquiescence is the fact that there are differences in its extent, depending on different scales. For example, when comparing responses given by Hispanics and non-Hispanics on 5 point scales and 10 point scales, the differences between the two groups are not constant in what concerns the extreme response styles (Hui and Triandis, 1989). This is why the sensitivity of response styles to the number of points in a scale should be of interest for the researchers, when analyzing data and attempting to measure acquiescence. When it comes to the length of the scales, longer scales are more prone to ARS than short scales, because, as the interview proceeds, the range of responses drops, and this happens to a greater extent the longer the scales are (Hui and Triandis, 1985). This is the reason why, when measuring ARS, two extreme values of the item are used for long scales (1–10) and one extreme value of the item is used for short scales (1–5, 1–4, 1–3).While agreement with a statement can turn into acquiescence and an acquiescent response style, and its reverse turns into DRS, one way in which to measure the orientations of individuals is to compute the net acquiescence response style (Baumgartner and Steenkamp, 2001). This is done by subtracting the disacquiescent responses from the acquiescent ones and it helps researchers better figure out how and in which form individuals' answers are offered. The authors also point out the fact that,

when attempting to measure response styles (including acquiescence), it is critical to be able to clearly differentiate between the substantive relevance of the answer and its stylistic determination.

Lamm and Keller (2007) consider only the extreme points of the scales when counting potentially acquiescent responses. Meisenberg and Williams (2008) built a similar index for measuring acquiescence, using 22 scaled items with variable number of points, varying from two to five, while not caring specifically for the symmetry between the positively and the negatively worded items.

Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) provide us with a synthesis of the explanations and measurement strategies for various response styles. For acquiescence, they point to two most common measurement scenarios: one based on counting the agreements with items whose contents are heterogeneous, and the other based on using balanced scales that include contradictory statements and adding the answers that agreed with both a statement and its opposite.

While the usual index of acquiescence is based on measurements of the raw ratings given by individuals, this is not the only and most clear strategy to be adopted in situations where balanced items are not present (Hui and Triandis, 1985). Even though the classic way of amounting acquiescence is based on statistical methods, such as summing the agreement answers, more complex strategies imply the use of factor analyses, as well as structural equation modelling (Cheung and Rensvold, 2000; Billiet and Davidov, 2008; Engle, 2010). Engle (2010) argues that simply counting agreement responses does not suffice since it relies on the assumption that all agreement responses are equivalent, when, in fact, not all the agreeing answers have the same 'load' in the final index. Also, scholars have shown that agreement with positive worded items comes easier to respondents than agreement with negative statements (Engle, 2010).

Response styles are difficult to detect, as they intervene when underlying preferences are studied. More than that, response styles are themselves latent aspects, not directly observable. The issue is how to distinguish between true preferences and response styles, as they are both latent. Van de Velden (2007) proposes a method of detecting response styles, including acquiescence, based on dual scaling of successive categories. The method deals with the distances between scale points (scale boundaries): if the distances are equal (the differences between boundary distances are 0 or close to 0), then there is no underlying response style. The response style is indicated by the different interboundary distances (the uneven distribution of points on the scale). The acquiescence response style is visible in cases where the distance between boundaries 5 and 6 (agreement) is much greater than the distance between boundaries 1 and 2 (disagreement), due to the number of respondents assigning the rating.

Johnson et al. (2005) explored both extreme response style and acquiescence by creating two indexes. The first consists of 61 items and used Smith's (2004) method. The remaining 18 items were symmetrically assembled – half of them

worded positively and half of them worded negatively. This created nine statements, each being measured by two contradictory items. Agreement with both items that defined a statement indicated inconsistency and was counted as acquiescence. Consistent answers were either in agreement with an item and in disagreement with the other, or in moderate position on both items. The index was computed as a count of number of inconsistent answers, and ranged from 0 to 9, with higher values reflecting more acquiescence. The construct validity was proved by high correlations with Hofstede's indicators and with the Smith's measurement (2004) computed for the rest of 61 items.

Herk et al. (2004) went beyond merely counting and indexing the answers to polar items that could reflect acquiescence (and extreme response style). Instead, they actually compared the answers given by the individuals with their real life behavior, as it has been self-reported. As for the acquiescence count, they calculated the disparity between positive and negative scores, by using as reference the first two and the last two points of the scale. Similarly to other studies on acquiescence, Herk et al. direct their focus on cultural and value related aspects, but unlike Smith (2004), they are reluctant in straight forwardly associating response styles with differences in values held by individuals. After performing variance analysis and Tukey-HSD tests for differences between countries, they concluded that method bias can affect cross-cultural studies, adding unexplained variance to the comparisons of even fairly similar countries. Also, it seems that there are asymmetries between computed scores and actual behavior, and, as such, that the response styles, as they are manifest at national level, should not be disregarded.

In their study on cultural differences and answers consistency in Americans and Koreans, Locke and Baik (2009) measured acquiescence by computing the average rating for each participant on a typical *Likert* scale. Their findings show that acquiescent responses were more frequent among Koreans than in the case of Americans. The method, similar to the one employed by Hinz et al. (2007), has the disadvantage that assumes acquiescent answers even when the answer reflects a pure preference for the positive choice related to the respective issue. Therefore the finding may simply indicate that Koreans display more homogeneous attitudes as compared to Americans.

In exploring the role of acculturation and education in how response styles are manifested by Hispanics, Marin et al. (1992) built indexes for both extreme response style and acquiescent style. While some scholars consider both 'strongly agree' and 'agree'/'very likely' and 'likely' answer choices, the authors only include the end point choices ('very likely') to build the acquiescence index. Further on, the index was computed by adding up the times that a respondent has situated himself or herself at the positive endpoint of the scale. Meanwhile, the extreme response index consisted of both types of extreme values (for example, on a scale from 1 to 9, both '1' answers and '9' answers were taken into account). The four data sets used in their analysis determined the authors to reiterate the findings

of Hui and Triandis (1989) that suggest that there is a considerable influence of the number of points in a scale on the variance of acquiescence, with longer scales having a greater potentiality of triggering ARS. Also, their results show that the acquiescent style of responding is in a negative relation with both the education level and the acculturation level.

Franzen and Vogl (2011) measure acquiescence for three different survey data: WVS (World Values Survey), EVS (European Values Survey) and ISSP (International Social Survey Programme), by computing and afterward comparing the agreement rate of the answers. One of the points they stress on refers to the wording of the questions, which they find to be of high influence in its association with different acquiescence levels. While WVS and EVS include scales with no neutral points, ISSP scales are centered; however, the three surveys were treated as comparable. A higher number of agreement answers were received in EVS and WVS, as compared to ISSP. The difference, explain Franzen and Vogl, can be attributed to the various number of response choices available to the respondents, but most of all to the presence or the lack of the middle point category. This absence of a neutral point pushes the potential answers towards the extremes, thus constituting a fertile ground for ARS to appear. This argument is in line with the perspectives to be presented in the next section of the paper.

To draw a line with regards to measuring acquiescence, there are multiple ways to do so, depending on the data to be analyzed, as well as on other aspects that should be treated with care. First of all, two main strategies can be delineated: using basic counting and summing of the agreement answers in the data or turning to more sophisticated statistical tools, such as SEM, to compute weights for each item that is considered. Secondly, when considering the values to be used in the measurement of acquiescence, authors are not convergent on whether to use only the anchors of the scale or the last two points of the scale (for example, both ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’).

It should also be noted that there are differences in the levels of acquiescence involved when answering positive statements, as opposed to answering negative statements. As such, measuring acquiescence for these two types of items should be done differentially – since people tend to more rapidly agree on statements that are formulated in a positive manner. The number of scale points seems to make a difference as well – as with positive/negative statements, people manifest diverse tendencies depending on the number of choices they have when positioning themselves.

Measuring acquiescence can be done at the individual level (and this is where discussions are concentrated on individuals traits, such as age and education as determinants of acquiescence), or at the group level (at which, elements related to cultural environments or communication styles are of interest). Also, the second level of measurement is relevant when it comes to cross national surveys and cross country comparisons.

HOW TO AVOID THE EFFECT OF ACQUIESCENCE AFTER DATA COLLECTION – DEALING WITH ARS IN DATA ANALYSIS

In the initial stage of any research, that of establishing the methodology and designing the instruments to work with, it is highly important for the researcher to be aware of the potential errors of measurement that can occur, as well as of other sources of bias. With regards to acquiescence, even though both positive and negative statements trigger acquiescent responses, there are differences between these two types of statement structures taken separately: positive statements are more prone to triggering acquiescent responses than the negative ones are (Yang et al., 2012). Thus, researchers have to keep in mind that questionnaires that are built so that they include negative statements, as well as positive ones can be used as a means of reducing this effect.

Naturally, it is not always possible for all the potential problems to be avoided, so knowing more about the effects of acquiescence and how to control for them after data collection is essential. In conclusion, what are the effects that acquiescence bias brings and how can these be avoided or controlled for?

One of the essential problems that researchers have to deal with concerns the distinction between the response style and the real attitudes. This problem emerges as both these elements are not manifest, but latent. Another issue is that once you choose a measurement strategy for acquiescence you still have to deal with the fact that this response style has to be controlled for, in order to minimize the sources of error in your data. Acquiescence can cause difficulties related to comparisons between seemingly similar studies, as well as between groups considered in the same study. The equivalence of the measuring instruments used in collecting data can also be affected, especially when it comes to cross national surveys. If the design of the instruments and the field research does not allow for a strict control of acquiescence, then controlling for its effects when dealing with data analysis is required.

Besides the balance between negative and positive items, the wording of the statements included in the questionnaire also proved to be highly significant in relation to acquiescence. More than that, the strategy known as 'forced choice' can also be useful (Watson, 1992). While usually *Likert* type scales include a neutral point, there are some scholars who argue that including this middle point allows respondents to use it as an 'escape route', at the aggregate level, generating middle point response bias. Still, as Presser and Schuman (1980) point out, the absence of this middle point is forcing responses into the extremes of the scale.

Another thing that must be kept in mind is that, when not presented with the 'don't know' choice answer, people tend to give answers that are not reflective of their true opinions, attitudes and preferences, especially since 'don't know' could really mean that respondents lack the required information to provide a different answer (McClendon and Alwin, 1993). Ferrando et al. (2011) have a different perspective on the significance of the forced choice strategy. For them, this is useful in controlling for acquiescence, and recommend that questionnaires include

items based on choosing between different statements, rather than requiring agreement or disagreement with them.

Rammstedt et al. (2010) choose to control for acquiescence by using two methods – computing and analyzing the deviations of each individual's mean across items and ipsatizing the answers – in order to assess how the *Big Five* model holds for persons with diverse levels of education. In a similar line of thought, Moors (2004) recommends using ranking measures instead of rating ones, in order to diminish or control the effects of response styles. Also, they propose a model of data analysis that accounts for acquiescence by containing both the content factor and the style factor. Moors (2004) sees the major advantage of this approach based on the use of latent class factors in the fact that an eventual response style will be identifiable even if it has not been assumed.

In their analysis on the effects of item wording on attitudes towards mathematics among fourth graders, Yang et al. (2012) use two method factors, in order to control for acquiescence. After factoring the positive and, respectively, the negative items, they compare the models that include only substantive factors (that is, answers that are content related) with the one containing the method factors as well.

Johnson and Bolt (2010) focus on accounting for individual differences in response styles; for this, they include these differences in the multidimensional multinomial logit item response model they build – which they call the FAMLM model. The use of this model allows them to clearly underline the difference between latent individual traits and response styles. Unlike models used in other studies, which are based on item level analysis, their model is based on category level, which allows them to use it for questionnaires that do not necessarily include balanced scales.

An interesting inquiry is that proposed by Greenleaf (1992), who controls for response styles (acquiescence and standard deviation), in order to explore their correlation with attitude information. His findings suggest that both acquiescence and standard deviation are linked more to attitude information than to bias components. His study is relevant in predicting the bias that response styles can bring to the data analysis.

Billiet et al. (2003) explore the link between national identity and attitude toward foreigners, and they explain it in terms of the "social representation of the nation" – they explore whether bipolar identity means that individuals have a sense of belonging to multiple nationalities or they have a faint sense of national belonging. In order to be able to properly interpret the middle point situation of the respondents, they controlled for acquiescence by using a balanced scale which included both positive and negative statements in measuring the attitude toward foreigners. In comparative settings, the validity and comparability of measurement constructs is vital. In other words, the measurement tools have to have the same understanding across the cultural groups.

Welkenhuysen-Gybels et al. (2003) also explore the level of equivalence of measurement constructs across different groups by means of controlling for acquiescence. They work not with the specific definition of acquiescence, as used

by Greenleaf (1992) and Watson (1992) – 'yea-saying', but with its general definition. The authors choose to use a structural equation model in analysing ISSP95 data, and stress on the fact that other content or style factors should also be kept in mind besides acquiescence.

Mirowsky and Ross (1991) present an interesting analysis of how defence-biased and agreement-biased measures should be kept under control by researchers. They are mainly focused on sense of control and how it can be properly explained, removing biases related to agreement and defensiveness tendencies. Technically speaking, they control for acquiescence by the means of correlations, regression and factor analysis.

RANKING, RATING AND FORCED CHOICE ANSWERS

The response styles are systematic biases that render the comparison of scores at face values meaningless (Herk et al., 2004). Without trying to control them, rankings obtained after data analysis will not be based on true preferences or attitudes, but on a mixture of content factors and response styles.

Ranking items seems to be less prone to ERS and ARS, because, as Inglehart explains (1997) when invited to rank statements, respondents actually make a choice (the directionality of the answers is more transparent), and a certain type of values is more easily interpretable by the researcher. Also, forced choice answers might be a solution for eluding acquiescence, as here there is less room for response content inconsistency (Tonner, 2001).

Acquiescence can be seen as answering inconsistency, contradictory to the axiomatic consistency of attitudes, values and beliefs. Locke and Baik (2009) compared Korean and American students in what concerns the consistency of their responses. They used hierarchical regression, in order to disentangle acquiescence and consistency, and they found that a study of the latter without accounting for the former provides biased results. In this specific case, re-ranking the sample groups after controlling for acquiescence showed differences when compared to the initial ranking that did not account for acquiescence. They also stress on the fact that acquiescence is only part of the total bias that affects consistency in response distributions across countries.

THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS – EXPLANATORY VARIABLES

During the last decades, in direct connection with the accentuated development of the phenomenon at global level and its changes (Castles and Miller ([1993] 2009), the attention academics pay to the international migration has been increasing. In this context, the number of studies investigating the native populations' attitudes towards immigrants, including cross-national comparative ones, has been consistently

raising. The recent increase in interest for attitudes towards immigrants, especially in its comparative dimension, was particularly stimulated by the implementation/ development of cross-national surveys. Eurobarometer, WSV and especially ISSP and ESS were extensively used for comparative studies (for a review on the topic see Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

Elaborating on the state of the art in the field, Ceobanu and Escandell (2010) make a distinction between the individual level explanations and structural or contextual ones. At micro level, the attitudes towards immigrants are mainly explained appealing to the socio-economic characteristics of individuals and their self-interests, their feelings of belonging, identifications and, more recently, values, and their experience of contact with the members of different groups. At the contextual level, the explanations mainly rely on the theory of group threat and, latterly, on the socialisation theory.

Related to the theoretical line accentuating the competitive dimension of the immigrants' presence in the host countries, ***labour force status*** and ***occupational category*** of individuals, along with ***income*** (individual or household level) prove to be important determinants of the attitudes. Rational and driven by their interests, the natives, especially under conditions of economic strain, perceive immigrants as competing for the same economic and spatial resources. Especially the individuals in precarious positions on the labour market and, in general, those in the most vulnerable socio-economic positions have the tendency to develop negative attitudes towards immigrants (e.g., Sides and Citrin, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2004; Rustenbach, 2010). Not only the objective position held by natives, but also their ***perception/satisfaction*** on/with the economical/overall personal or societal situation influence the attitudes (Sides and Citrin, 2007). In direct connection with the mentioned predictors, increased ***education*** favours positive attitudes towards immigrants. The effect of education is not only related to its contribution to acquiring a better job and associated income. More educated people are more reflexive, more exposed to foreign cultures, and, as they spent more time in the educational system, more exposed to the democratic values transmitted through (Coenders and Scheepers, 2003).

The effect of socio-demographic variables (***age***, ***sex***, ***marital status***, ***type of residence***) proves to be less stable, compared to the socio-economic determinants (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Generally, the young, and especially those residing in urban area, are showing more favourable attitudes towards immigrants (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010, 2011). Women seem to be less concerned about the immigration effects than men (Fitzgerald, 2011). The effect of being married is unclear (and part of the studies does not consider it). Having a family is generally associated with more concern about the family well-being, favouring the perception of immigrants as threat, and, consequently, negative attitudes towards them (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010).

At attitudinal level, the attachment and ***identification with the national community*** is one of the most important factors influencing individuals' stance

towards immigrants (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Originated in the work of Tajfel (1982), the line of reasoning states that individuals identifying themselves with a group develop favourable feelings to the in-group members, and try to differentiate from outsiders through negative attitudes towards them. As a general rule, the individuals more attached to the national body tend to be less favourable to the immigrants (e.g., Sides and Citrin, 2007; Billiet et al. 2003; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2008), while the identification with supranational structures (e.g., EU) has the reverse effect (Sides and Citrin, 2007). Yet, recent studies point to the different influence that distinct types of national belonging exert on attitudes. Billiet et al. (2003) argue that the relationship is dependent on the social representation of the national identity: in the case of an ethnic-cultural representation of the nation, the effect on attitudes is positive (increasing negative attitudes), but in the case of a civic-republican representation the effect is opposite. Other studies (e.g., Ceobanu and Escandell, 2008) take into account the multidimensional nature of national feelings and posit the different influence each dimension exerts on attitudes towards migrants. Thus, the institutional legitimacy is associated with a negative effect, while protectionism, nativism and chauvinism push to a positive one.

Recently, a new line of research was opened by the work of Davidov et al. (2008). Starting from the Shalom Schwartz's theory, they modelled the relationship between attitudes towards immigrants and self-transcendence and conservation ***value*** types. Their hypotheses that individuals scoring high on self-transcendent values develop strong positive attitudes towards migrants, in contrast with those scoring high on conservation values was supported by the data.

Political-ideological orientations of the individuals also influence their stance towards immigrants. Pardos-Prado (2011) argues that left-right self-placement helps individuals to frame their attitudes (a left self-placement favour positive attitudes towards migrants, the right self-placement has an opposite effect), but the function of ideological mediation is weakened in times of high contextual economic and social vulnerability.

Perceptions about the size of the immigrant population (in the neighbourhood or society) also affect the natives' attitudes (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Conflated estimations on the size and negatively evaluated consequences accentuate the threatening dimension of immigration, increasing the individuals' tendency to take a negative stance towards foreigners (Sides and Citrin, 2007).

ATI could be considered as a particular case of the attitudes towards *social solidarity* and support. In this context, several other predictors become salient, including *social trust* (Pardos-Prado, 2011, Sides and Citrin, 2007; Rustenbach, E., 2010) and *religious attendance* (Fitzgerald, 2011; Davidov et al., 2008), which should increase benevolence towards immigrants. Being *immigrant or belonging to a minority group* (Sides and Citrin, 2007) should also lead to more favourable ATI, since being object to this type of attitudes should, implicitly, lead to positive approaches of the issue.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS AND ACQUIESCENCE EFFECTS IN ROMANIA

Nowadays Romania is an emigration country. The figures describing outmigration are not very precise (Şerban, 2011), but their range suggests a consistent emigration in the past two decades (Sandu and Alexandru, 2009). On the other hand, immigration is rare and is concentrated in a few larger cities (Alexe and Păunescu, eds., 2011). The global economic crisis hindered the growth of labour force demand, and prevented the increase of outmigration.

This makes incoming migration to be an issue far from the Romanian public agenda, with very little public debate and even lesser salience in private discussions. These are characteristics which would expose ATI survey questions to acquiescence effects. Respondents may face an issue that they never considered, that has no or at most very low relevance to their life and social environment, and that is not documented in the sources that they access. They might have an attitude towards emigration, due to encountering examples of emigrants among their relatives and friends, but their attitude towards immigrants is more likely loose.

This is the issue that our paper investigates. We do expect acquiescence effects on ATI measurement in Romania. The topic being not very familiar to the respondents, it should be exposed to acquiescence. However, as we have already explained, there is no consensus upon measuring ARS. This leaves space to further exploring. We propose four distinct measurements for acquiescence. Two of them are based on counting acquiescent or disacquiescent answers. We derived them from the existing literature: the crude rate of acquiescence is based on Smith (2004) and indicates the percentage of potential acquiescent answers given by each respondent. The net acquiescence score is suggested by Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2005). We compute it as difference between the share of acquiescent and disaquescent answers. The other two indicators that we employ are weighted sums of acquiescent answers. A factor analysis allowed us to derive a latent acquiescent score, in the line suggested by Billiet and Davidov (2008), Cheung and Rensvold (2000), Engle (2010). Finally, we computed an original index of acquiescence, weighting each item with the percentage of positive responses to the respective questions in our sample. This original index follows the idea of acquiescence being dependent on societal representation upon the studied object (Engle, 2010; Smith, 2004).

We test the effects of each of these acquiescence indicators on the attitudes towards immigrants. The first aim is to test our main hypothesis that in Romania ATI is depending on ARS. The second aim is to see if the four measures are reliable indicators for acquiescence.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

We employ the Romanian 2008 wave of the European Value Study (EVS). EVS questionnaires are interesting for studying acquiescence due to the fact that they include mainly measurements of attitudes and opinions, and make use of

rating scales which are more likely to suffer from ARS effects. As argued, Romania is a good country to test for ARS impact on ATI measures, due to its very low incoming migration flows. The probabilistic sample includes 1 489 cases, being representative at the national level.

Five items are used to compute the dependent variable. All are scaled from 1 to 10, opposing pairs of two polar statements each. The first item refers employment consequences for incoming migration: *Immigrants take jobs away from natives in a country* vs. *Immigrants do not take jobs away from natives in a country.* The second pair of statements considers cultural consequences: *A country's cultural life is undermined by immigrants* vs. *A country's cultural life is not undermined by immigrants.* The third item refers crime: *Immigrants make crime problems worse* vs. *Immigrants do not make crime problems worse.* The fourth one address social solidarity: *Immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system* vs. *Immigrants are not a strain on a country's welfare system.* The fifth pair of statements is the most general, considering immigration as a whole: *In the future the proportion of immigrants will become a threat to society* vs. *In the future the proportion of immigrants will not become a threat to society*. A factor analysis reveals the presence of a single dimension; the extracted factor using maximum likelihood estimation explains 50% of the total variation and all communalities are higher than 0.355, while the smaller factor loading is 0.596. We have used the respective loadings to compute our dependent variable.

We have linearly transformed the factors score, such as higher values, to indicate more favourable attitudes towards immigrants. On the 1 to 10 scale that described each item who questioned attitudes towards immigrants, acquiescent effects would have determined the respondents to choose answers closer to the upper limit. When reversing the ATI factor score, ARS indicators should therefore be negatively related to it.

The database includes 163 items which measure attitude, value or opinion. They include dichotomous choices, 4-point, 5-point, and 10-point scales. Let's consider those scales for which the answer choices were presented to the respondent in ascending order, starting with the negative ones, and then the positive ones. In the following, we will refer these items as "positively-worded". In the four point scales we have considered the answers coded with 4 as indicating a positive answer. For five point scales codes 5 were counted, while in 10 point scales, codes 9 and 10 stood for positive answers. In the case of the reversed scales, we have made similar options, selecting the answers coded with the lowest figures as acquiescent.

First, for each respondent we have computed the share of positive answers to all scales and binary choices which were positively worded. Then we have derived a similar score for the negatively-worded scales and binary items. Studying the correlation between the two allows assessing for the presence of ARS (Smith, 2004). In order to exclude the effect of missingness, we have divided each of the two counts by the number of positively –, respectively negatively – worded items to which the respondent gave a valid answer. Although the EVS 2008 database is rich in opinion items, only five of them are negatively-worded. This allows little

variation for the indicator based on negatively-worded items. Therefore, the correlation between the two measures of ARS is not very informative, but it gives a hint about the presence of acquiescence.

In order to check for the presence of acquiescence, we have considered, for each respondent, the total number of potential acquiescent answers, irrespectively of their wording. Since there are 163 items, this number should vary between 0 (no potentially acquiescent answer) and 163 (all items were answered with potential acquiescent choices). If the respondent refused to answer to an item, or said he or she is undecided, we did not consider that item. Therefore, for some respondents, the total number of items with valid answers decreased.

The share of potential acquiescent answers given by a respondent to the valid items becomes our first ARS indicator. In the following, we will refer it as the crude acquiescence rate (CAR). We have also computed a net acquiescence score (NAS) employing the logic depicted by Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2005). For each individual, the number of potential disacquiescent answers was subtracted from the number of potential acquiescent answers. The result was divided by the number of considered items, excluding the ones to which the answer was "don't know" or was missing.

All the 163 items were transformed in dummy variables that coded with 1 the potentials indication for ARS. Then we have employed exploratory factor analysis to identify the latent orientation towards acquiescence, and computed a first weighted ARS indicator that we have labelled as the factorial acquiescence score (FAS). FAS is close to the idea which lays behind the ipsatization principle, and overcomes the difficulties encompassed by having items gauged by scales that differ in range. Somehow naturally due to the large number of considered items, FAS does not explain much of the total variance, but only 8%. Its eigenvalue is 14, while for the next two factors is 6, then 4.5, 4.3, 3.9, 3.3, etc. The scree plot also suggests that extracting one factor might be possible, despite its very low contribution to explaining the variance.

We have also computed the intuitively-weighted acquiescence (IWASR). This is a summative index of the 163 dummy variables, similar to the crude acquiescence rate. Comparatively to CAR, IWARS does not give each item equal importance, but it uses weights, like in the case of FAS. However, we do not use automatic computation of the weights. Instead, for each item, we computed the percentages of respondents which gave potentially acquiescent answers. These percentages become the weights to be used when summing up the 163 binary variables derived from the initial items. Like in the case of CAR and NAS, missing answers were ignored, and, for each respondent, the weighted sum was divided by the total number of valid answers.

To check the internal consistency of each of our measurement we have assessed their correlations. Then we have focused on external validity, using the case of attitudes towards immigrants. OLS models were employed to test for the association of the ATI factor with the ARS measures. We have run a set of four models, predicting attitudes towards immigrants with each of the four measures for acquiescence: CAR, NAS, FAS and IWARS, and various controls.

In order to do this, several independent variables were either available in the dataset, either constructed from existing information. They include age (years), gender (dummy variable; female = 1), living in couple (either married or not, dummy variable), living in rural areas (dummy variable), highest level of education degree (16 categories), being employed (dummy variable) or unemployed (dummy variable), life satisfaction (10-point scale), satisfaction with society as a whole (measured as satisfaction with the way things are going with the system for governing Romania, 10-point scale), social trust (dummy variable, resulting from the agreement with statement "most people can be trusted" and rejecting the alternate choice of "you can't be too careful in dealing with people"), pride to be Romanian (4 point scale, which stand as indicator for overall strength of national identity), other ethnicity than Romanian (dummy variable), political stance on the left–right scale (10 point scale), relative income (12 categories), and orientation towards social solidarity (factor score extracted using MLE and explaining 49% of the total variance of eight items, all being 5 point scales that express how concerned the respondent feels about the living conditions of people in own neighbourhood, people in the region where she/he lives, fellow countrymen, Europeans, all humans over the world, and groups at risk in Romania – elderly people, unemployed, sick and disabled children in poor families; all communalities are over 0.24, while KMO = 0.859). EVS 2008 data set provides no measure for assessing the size of the immigrant group, but there is an item tapping for agreement with the statement "Today in Romania, there are too many immigrants" (5 points scale). The item can be considered as a proxy for perceptions about the size of the immigrant group, but also as expressing anti-immigrant feelings. Therefore, we have run the models in two scenarios: with and without the respective measure.

Two of the predictors, the political stance and the relative income, have a large number of missing answers, up to a fourth of the total sample. The volume of missing information is too big to allow imputations without the risk to lead to spurious results. In order to test for the robustness of the OLS models, we have run them with and without the two predictors, and we have compared the results. Listwise deletion was used in each of the two scenarios. When excluding income and political stance from the model, the total number of missing answers is lower than 2%.

OLS models were built using these predictors, along with CAR, NAS, FAS, IWARS, in order to predict ATI. Then, we have tested the sensitivity of our ARS indicators, by computing CAR, NAS, and IWARS in a different way. Our concern was related to the risk of over-including potential acquiescent answers as indicators for ARS, when some of these answers might have been genuine choices. In order to contain the hazard, we have recomputed CAR, NAS and IWARS using as reference only those items that received a large majority of potentially acquiescent answers. First, we have restricted the number of considered items to those where more than 50% of the respondents offered potential acquiescent choices. This limited the computation of the ARS indicators to only 32 questions out of the 163, and allowed to calculate CAR50, NAS50, and IWARS50. Similarly, we have computed CAR70, NAS70, and IWARS70, based on the 15 items to which more than 70% of the respondents offered potential acquiescent answers.

Table no. 1

Descriptive statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
Age	18	93	46.4	18.37
Gender (female=1)	0	1	52%	0.50
Marital status (married=1)	0	1	68%	0.47
Type of residence (rural=1)	0	1	46%	0.50
Education	1	16	7.9	3.32
Employment (employed=1)	0	1	49%	0.50
Unemployed (unemployed=1)	0	1	3%	0.16
Satisfaction with life (overall)	1	10	6.8	2.51
Satisfaction with the system for governing the country	1	10	4.7	2.28
Political-ideological orientations (left–right)	1	10	5.8	2.17
Minority status (other ethnicity than Romanian)	0	1	8%	0.27
Social trust	0	1	18%	0.38
Church attendance (at least monthly)	0	1	48%	0.50
Overall strength of national identity (How proud are you of being Romanian)	1	4	3.2	0.74
Immigrant population in the country	1	5	2.5	1.13
Social solidarity (factor score)	–2.1	2.1	0	1.0
ATI (attitudes towards immigrants, factor score)	–2.0	1.6	0	0.9

Employing the corresponding 32 questions we have derived, as factor scores, a FAS50 indicator, while a FAS70 is based on the 15 items with very strong consensus. FAS50 explains 11% of the total variance, while for the FAS70, the total explained variance is 18%. Although the figures are quite low, we decided to use the two indicators in order to assess if the impact would be noticeable.

Using the two sets of new ARS indicators we have run the same models described above, and tested if the impact of acquiescence depends on how many items one considers as basis for computing CAR, NAS, IWARS, or FAS. In the case of the later indicator (FAS), in the OLS models we have considered only FAS50 and FAS70. The computation of the factorial score is complicated, in the case of FAS by the presence of missing information. Since all variables are considered, the resulting FAS values can be computed only for a very tiny subsample of respondents. This denies regression analysis as an option.

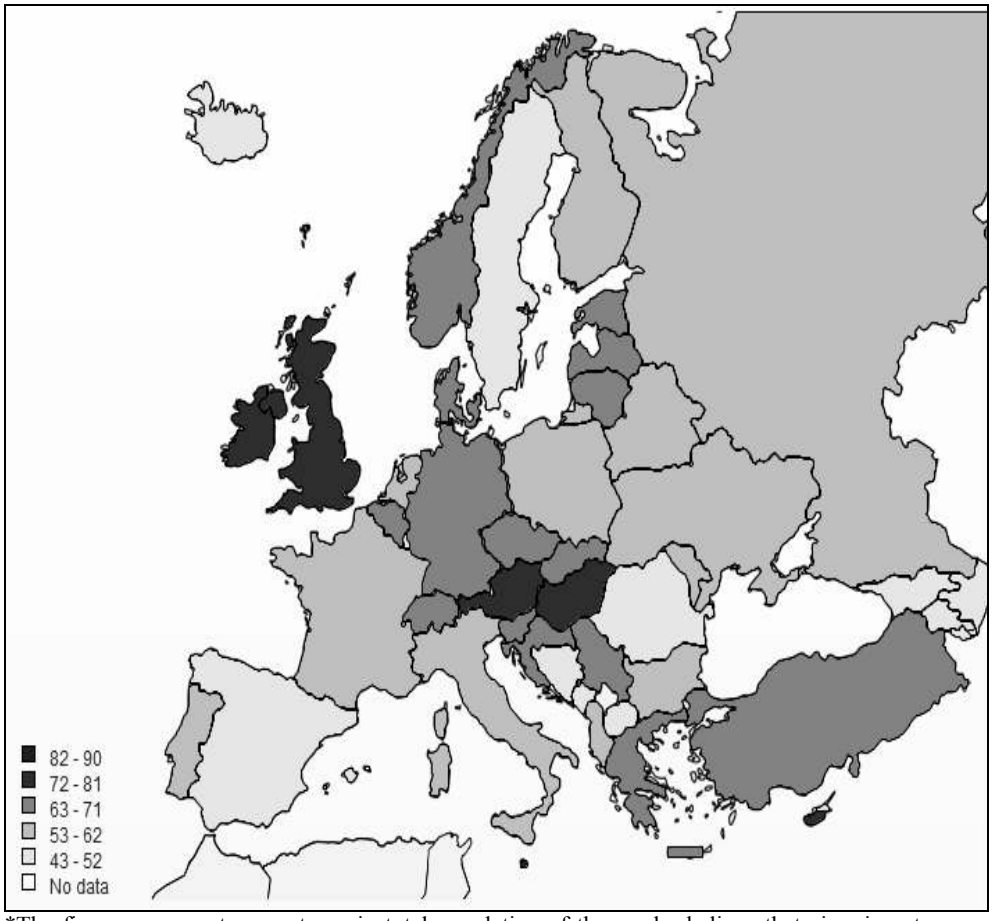
FINDINGS

A first look at the items that are used to compute the dependent variable reveals a Romanian society that is relatively tolerant with immigrants, as compared to other European countries. 51% of the Romanian respondents to the 2008 EVS wave think that immigrants take jobs away from natives in a country, 41% say that immigrants undermine culture, 46% believe that immigrants make crime problems worse, 46% are afraid that immigration strains the welfare system, and 44% support the statement “in the future the proportion of immigrants will become a

threat to society". All these figures are below the European average, except for the first one which is around average. *Figure 1* illustrates this, for the opinions about immigration's consequences for the welfare system.

Figure 1

Attitudes towards impact of immigration on the welfare system across Europe



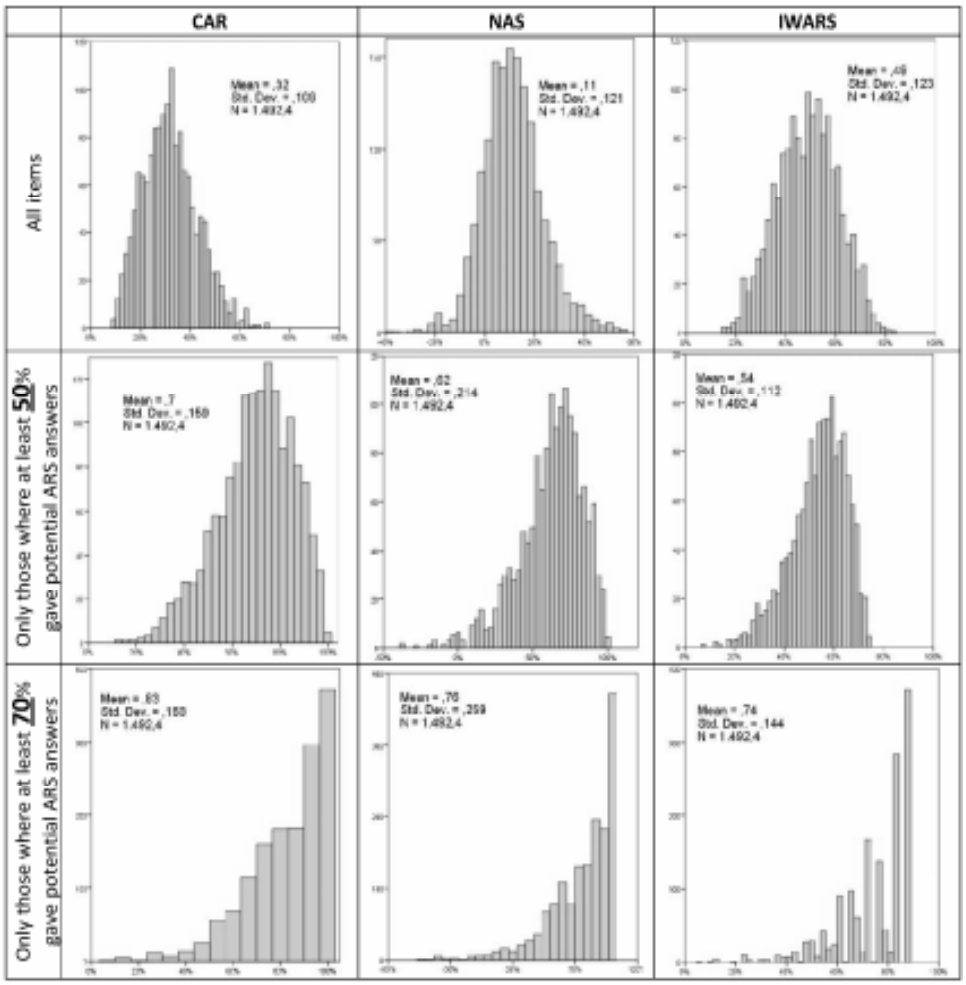
*The figures represent percentages in total population of those who believe that „immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system". Data source: EVS 2008–2009. The map was drawn using http:// http://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu.

Describing Romania as one of the most tolerant societies in respect to immigration may be explained by being an emigration nation and by the very low contact with incoming migrants. From a different perspective, compared to other European societies, the country is rather traditional (Voicu, 2007). Therefore, it would be consistent that attitudes towards immigrants are relatively more negative. Acquiescence might be a potential cause for this more optimistic opinion towards incoming migrants. However,

due to the wording of the questions tapping for ATI, we expect that acquiescence actually makes the attitudes towards immigrants slightly more unfavourable.

Figure 2

Distributions of various ARS indicators



The first check for detecting ARS presence is to investigate the correlation between the share of potential acquiescent answers to positively-worded questions at one hand, and to negatively-worded question on the other. The latter category is less numerous, and includes only six items. This decreases the potential variation, and, consequently, the probability of a large correlation. However, the two measures are significantly ($p < 0.0005$) and positively related, with a *Pearson* correlation coefficient of 0.442. The covariance of the two measures indicates possible acquiescence effects in the sample.

Therefore, it is legitimate to compute acquiescence indicators. *Figure 2* describes the distributions of CAR, NAS and IWARS. Through their computational algorithm, the crude acquiescence rates and the intuitively weighted acquiescence indicators vary from 0 to 1. The net acquiescence scores have a theoretical lower bound of –1, and a maximum of +1. Each of the three measures was computed in three different scenarios. First we have considered all 163 items. The resulting indicators are depicted in the first row of the figure, all distributions being normal. On the second row, we have constrained the computing of the three indicators at the 32 items for which a majority larger than 50% offered potentially acquiescent answers. The three distributions continue to be normal, with a slight left asymmetry. In the last scenario, the most restrictive one, only 15 items are employed. For each of them, majorities larger than 70% have chosen potentially acquiescent answer choices. Since the number of items is lower, the variation is smaller and the distributions reproduce only parts of the normal curve, being much skewed.

The bivariate correlations between each set of three measures are very high. For the pairs between CAR, NAS and IWARS, the *Pearson* correlation coefficients range from 0.70 to 0.86. CAR50, NAS50 and IWARS50 are also strongly correlated: r is between 0.80 and 0.99. When restraining the analysis to the most consensual items, the range is from 0.82 to 0.99. In all triads, crude acquiescence rates and the intuitively weighted indicators are the ones to be the closest related. Considering the covariances between the same measures computed in different scenarios, they are still significant at $p < 0.0005$, but less powerful. For instance, considering the crude acquiescence rates, CAR and CAR50 correlate at 0.64, CAR and CAR70 correlate at 0.30, while CAR50 and CAR70 correlate at 0.80. The net acquiescent scores are stronger related, with a minimum of 0.38 between NAS and NAS70, and a maximum of 0.96 describing the correlation between NAS50 and NAS70. For the three IWARS, the correlation coefficients vary from 0.61 to 0.86.

The factorial acquiescent score is difficult to compute, due to missingness. Only 30 respondents have no missing information on the 163 items, therefore it is difficult to compute an appropriate indicator. If considering these 30 respondents, FAS is strongly related to all the other nine indicators. The smallest correlation coefficient is 0.45, with NAS70, while the highest is 0.98, with CAR. Computing the FAS indicators for a limited number of items is easier. FAS50 and FAS70 are computed for 937, respectively 739 respondents, and refer to those items where consensus is stronger and include potential acquiescent answers from at least 50% or 70% of the respondents in the sample. FAS50 and FAS70 are strongly correlated ($r = 0.99$). Their correlations with the indicators based on all 163 items are significant, but low (0.2–0.4). The correlation coefficients with CAR, IWARS and NAS indicators increase to 0.5–0.6 when the 50% majority is imposed as restriction for these indicators (CAR50, NAS50, IWARS50), and to 0.8–0.9, in the most restrictive scenario (CAR70, NAS70, IWARS70).

All these bivariate relations suggest that the ARS indicators that we have proposed are closely inter-related, and measure the same object. In the following, we use them as estimators of acquiescence answering, to predict attitudes towards immigration in multivariate regression models.

The first series of OLS models includes all controls mentioned in the previous sections but perceived size of immigrant population, income, and political stance. Life satisfaction, social solidarity, education, church attendance, national pride, and being married are the significant covariates. Among them, life satisfaction is the strongest. An increase of 1 point on its scale leads to 0.08 increase of the attitudes favourable to immigrants, which is reasonable high, considering the range and the variance of the ATI (see *Table no. 2*). Social solidarity is also significant: an increase of 1 point on its scale determines a 0.24 increase in favourable ATI. Both life satisfaction and social solidarity act as expected in line with the latest theoretical developments). Another explanatory variable that leads to an increase in favourable ATI is age, leading to a small increase, of only 0.006 – the effect of age is unstable and contrary to the expectations, since in general, the younger persons are more prone to have more positive opinions on immigration. Significant at the 0.05 level, the effect of education on ATI is also positive (an increase of 1 point on its scale leads to an increase of 0.02 in ATI), as indicated by theory. The strength of national identity is significant at the 0.05 level, as well and increases favourable ATI with 0.08 for a 01 point increase on its scale. As opposed to what we might expect from theory, church attendance negatively influences ATI – an increase of 1 point in church attendance (which is highly significant at the 0.01 level) leads to a 0.185 decrease in favourable ATI. This could be explained by the association between religiosity and traditionalism (Crawford and Hagen, 2009). Contact with migrants is also important. Location in rural areas (significant negative effect) and being employed (significant positive effect) are proxies for such opportunities of contact. Their effects are weak, but point in the expected direction.

In the models that also include the representation of the size of the immigrant group ("it is too big"), the effect of this predictor is significant and negative, as we have expected. When including income and political stance as independent variables, the other controls change effects at most slightly. The most notable, social trust becomes significantly associated with ATI, leading to more favourable attitudes towards migrants.

Table no. 3 displays the regression coefficients for the effects of the ARS indicators on attitudes towards immigrants in all the OLS models that have not included political stance and income as controls. As mentioned, due to the wording of the ATI questions, we expected a significant negative effect of the ARS indicators. This is the case of the effects of CAR and NAS, in all the models that we have tested. Both have strong influence on the dependent variable, with standardized effects comparable to social solidarity and education. FAS50 and FAS70 also have negative significant consequences for ATI measurement, but their effect is less powerful. In the models where we do not control for the representations upon the size of immigrant population, the effects of restricted ARS indicators are puzzling. They become non-significant, in some models change sign, while the effects of CAR70 and IWARS70 are both significant (at $p \leq 0.10$) and positive.

Table no. 2

Regression coefficients for the model including NAS as predictor

	Unstandardized		**Standardized**	**Significance levels**
predictors	B	Std. Error	Beta	
intercept	–0.89	(0.205)		***
age	0.01	(0.002)	0.11	***
woman	0.05	(0.058)	0.03	
married	–0.10	(0.064)	–0.05	
rural	–0.10	(0.058)	–0.06	†
education level	0.02	(0.010)	0.08	*
employed	0.11	(0.067)	0.06	†
unemployed	0.06	(0.184)	0.01	
satisfaction – individual	0.08	(0.012)	0.22	***
satisfaction – societal	–0.01	(0.013)	–0.02	
minority status	–0.08	(0.124)	–0.02	
social trust	0.12	(0.073)	0.05	
church attendance	–0.19	(0.059)	–0.10	***
overall strength of national identity	0.08	(0.041)	0.07	*
social solidarity factor	0.24	(0.034)	0.24	***
Net Acquiescence Score	–2.02	(0.262)	–0.26	***

*** $p < 0.005$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; † $p < 0.10$.

Overall, the factorial acquiescent scores, both FAS50 and FAS70, are the indicators which act more consistent with the theoretical expectations. However, their effects are weak.

The crude acquiescent rates computed for the selected items where more potentially acquiescent consensus was registered have not the expected effects when not controlling for the subjective representations about the size of the immigrant group. Particularly, CAR70 have the opposite influence, while CAR50 changes the sign of its effect in the right-hand model from *Table no. 3*. If controlling for income and political stance, the changes are in the direction specified by theory: CAR50 becomes negative in the left-hand models, but it is not significant; CAR70 becomes non-significant whether controlling for representations over the size of the immigrant populations or not.

The net acquiescent scores are negatively associated to ATI, except for NAS70, in the left-hand model from *Table no. 3*. When controlling for income and political stance, the results are unchanged.

The intuitively weighted indicators perform the worst. In *Table no. 3*, there is only one model, the right-side one in which an IWARS indicator has a significant negative impact that is consistent with our expectations. When income and political stance are added to the models, the unexpected significant effect of IWARS70 in the left-hand model disappears, and IWARS50 become significant in the right-hand model.

The ARS indicators were computed either for the all 163 items, for those items where more than half of the respondents offered potentially acquiescent answers, or

for those items where this majority was of 70%. The first set of indicators proves to be the most consistent with the expectations. When employing information from all 163 items, no matter which controls we add to the model, CAR, NAS and IWARS have negative effects, and there is only one model in which this effect is not highly significant. Contrary to this, most indicators computed based on the most restrictive set of indicators (the "70" set of ARS measures) performs the worst.

Table no. 3

OLS unstandardized regression coefficients for ARS effects on ATI

	Models not including representations over the share of immigrants in total population#				**Models including representations over the share of immigrants in total population#**			
	b	p	SE	Adjusted R^2	b	p	SE	Adjusted R^2
CAR	–0.97	***	0.28	10.3%	–1.64	***	0.27	24.8%
NAS	–2.02	***	0.26	14.8%	–2.15	***	0.24	28.1%
IWARS	–0.30	ns	0.25	9.3%	–0.98	***	0.24	23.0%
CAR50	0.45	ns	0.21	9.2%	–0.36	*	0.20	21.8%
NAS50	–0.08	ns	0.15	9.2%	–0.31	**	0.14	21.9%
IWARS50	0.15	ns	0.30	9.2%	–0.42	ns	0.28	21.7%
FAS50	–0.08	*	0.04	12.8%	–0.09	**	0.03	19.8%
CAR70	0.37	†	0.20	9.5%	0.10	ns	0.19	21.5%
NAS70	0.08	ns	0.12	9.2%	–0.06	ns	0.11	21.5%
IWARS70	0.44	†	0.06	9.5%	0.11	ns	0.22	21.5%
FAS70	–0.09	*	0.04	11.6%	–0.10	**	0.04	19.2%

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$; † $p \leq 0.10$; ns: not significant.

all models include controls for gender, age, education, marital status, urban–rural localization, belonging to ethnic minorities, employment status, church attendance, social trust, life satisfaction, societal satisfaction, social solidarity.

The above considerations lead to relative caution when assessing the effects of ARS on attitudes towards immigrants. Some ARS indicators prove not efficient to illustrate the expected effect. However, most of the findings support our hypothesis that ATI is exposed to acquiescence, in Romania. As for our second research question, it seems that weighted indicators act better. However, the weights should not be intuitive as in the IWARS indicators, but rather empirically determined, as in FAS. The second strategy has the big disadvantage that needs complete information, which makes it difficult to be used. If not using weighted indicators, NAS seems the most appropriate measure for acquiescence. The net acquiescence scores kept having negative effects, irrespectively of which other predictors we controlled for. More, in all but one model, the impact of the NAS indicators on ATI prove significant.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the case of our Romanian sample, acquiescence has a strong effect on measuring attitudes towards immigrants. The standardized size of the effect is

comparable with the most important determinants of ATI – social solidarity, life satisfaction and education. Among the various indicators that we have tested, the net acquiescent scores are the most reliable, and the best strategy is to use all information existing in the data set to derive ARS indicators. Employing only those items for which a majority of respondents gave potential acquiescent answers led to indicators which have unstable effects. On the other hand, even if unstable, these effects point rather in the directions of our theoretical expectations, and provide support for using ARS indicators as predictors for the attitudes towards immigrants.

Considering the wording of the questions that measure attitudes towards immigrants in the EVS questionnaire, acquiescence does not lead to overestimations of ATI, but to slightly more moderate favourable opinions. Therefore, the relatively optimistic view of immigrants that was observed for Romania should find its sources in other determinants. They may include low exposure to immigration, high emigration rate and dependency on remittances. We remember that Romania is a particular case among EU countries: it has a very low incoming migration, which reduces direct contact with immigrants to Romania. On the other hand, any Romanian resident has a high probability to find emigrants among friends, relatives, and former schoolmates and co-workers. This brings some basic information about immigration-related issues, although they do not apply to the society as such, but to its members that migrated abroad. The implication relates to a need to test the inspected relations in other societies, as well.

Indeed, ATI seems to be also influenced by contextual factors. They are usually associated with country level, but recent literature also considers regional ones (Rustenbach, 2010). The hypotheses regarding these influences are generally inferred from the group competition/conflict theory. Precarious economic conditions (GDP per capita and/or unemployment being the most used indicators) usually stimulate the negative attitudes towards immigrants (Pardos-Prado, 2011; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2011; Davidov et al., 2008). Placed in the same line of explanation, the size of the immigrant group at destination level influences the intensity of natives-immigrants competition: an increased number of immigrants is perceived as a threat, and stimulates a negative view towards them (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010, 2011).

Inferring from the socialising theory, other authors use the length of the liberal-democratic tradition of a country and the heterogeneity of its population (tested especially in the form of religious heterogeneity) as predictor variables (e.g., Coenders and Sheepers, 2003). As the time one country experiences as a liberal-democracy increases, its educational system is more prone to transmit values favouring positive attitudes towards immigrants. Similarly, in the case of heterogeneous populations, in order to avoid conflicts, a political culture of peaceful accommodation is transmitted through the educational system, stimulating more the tolerant attitudes.

Inspecting the effects of these determinants in a multilevel approach when controlling for acquiescence indicators should be a direction for further research. Future analysis should also consider the dependency of the effect of acquiescence on the policy toward immigrants, as a factor which may interact with the others in building a context where response styles may manifest or not.

If ARS makes different impacts on ATI measurement depending on the country, the implications of our findings are important when considering cross-country comparison. Therefore, we suggest caution in comparing mean values for ATI across societies without firstly testing for and cleaning the impact of acquiescence.

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Articolul de faţă discută consecinţele tendinţei de a răspunde pozitiv la întrebări de chestionar (acquiescence) *asupra măsurării atitudinilor faţă de imigranţi. Aplicaţia este realizată pe cazul României, o societate care cunoaşte un firav flux migrator care să atragă populaţie din afara ţării, dar care a experimentat recent o emigraţie puternică. Aceasta creează premisele unei cunoaşteri reduse a problematicii induse de imigraţie pentru ţara de destinaţie, contrabalansată parţial de prezenţa unor imigranţi români în reţeaua socială imediată şi printre rude. Ipoteza centrală este cea a unui efect important al* acquiescence *(atitudinii aprobatoare) asupra atitudinilor faţă de migranţi. Pentru a proba acest lucru, folosim datele EVS 2008 culese în România şi modele de regresie. Arătăm, de asemenea, că scorurile nete de* acquiescence *reprezintă indicatorii cei mai fiabili pentru această atitudine dintre cei pe care îi comparăm.*

Cuvinte-cheie*:* acquiescence *(atitudine aprobatoare), atitudini faţă de imigranţi, România, EVS 2008, comparaţii la nivel internaţional.*

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