



The Psychosocial Perception of Fundamental Rights Compliance in Crisis Contexts: Between Trust in Authorities and the Sense of Personal Security

Mihaela Rus

Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, Ovidius University, Constanța, Romania
The Institute of Philosophy and Psychology of the Romanian Academy

Abstract

The compliance with fundamental rights during crisis situations—such as pandemics, natural disasters, or states of emergency—raises essential questions regarding how individuals perceive the legitimacy and proportionality of governmental actions. This study investigates the psychosocial perception of citizens concerning the respect for fundamental rights in exceptional contexts, with a focus on the balance between public trust in authorities and the subjective feeling of personal security. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from social psychology, human rights law, and crisis communication, the research explores how factors such as institutional trust, exposure to mass media, and previous experiences with state intervention shape perceptions of rights compliance. The study uses a mixed-method approach, combining survey-based quantitative data with qualitative insights from interviews and focus groups. The central aim is to assess whether restrictive measures are perceived as protective or repressive, and how this perception varies across social categories. The findings are expected to provide valuable data for improving public policies that ensure both security and civil liberties during future crises. This paper contributes to the broader understanding of how democratic values are maintained or challenged in times of crisis, with implications for both governance and civic resilience.

Keywords: fundamental rights, crisis perception, institutional trust, personal security, psychosocial analysis

1. Introduction

Crisis contexts such as pandemics, natural disasters, or political emergencies significantly challenge the stability of democratic institutions and the protection of fundamental rights. During such times, states may adopt extraordinary measures to ensure public safety, which often implies temporary restrictions on civil liberties. While these restrictions may be

legally justified under international human rights frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), their legitimacy ultimately depends on public perception and institutional trust (Venice Commission, 2020; Dyzenhaus, 2006).

Public trust in institutions plays a critical role in democratic resilience and citizens' compliance with emergency measures (Levi & Stoker, 2000). Equally important is the subjective feeling of personal security, which mediates how citizens evaluate both the necessity and proportionality of state actions (Huddy et al., 2005). The psychological and social factors that shape these perceptions—such as prior experiences with authorities, political culture, media narratives, and civic education—remain underexplored in empirical research. This study investigates the psychosocial perception of fundamental rights compliance in crisis contexts and examines how trust in authorities and the sense of personal security interrelate.

Psychosocial perceptions play a pivotal role in how citizens evaluate the legitimacy and effectiveness of governmental actions, particularly in times of crisis. These perceptions are shaped not only by observable outcomes but also by subjective feelings of trust, fairness, safety, and identification with institutional values (Tyler, 2006; Jost & Banaji, 1994). When individuals perceive authorities as procedurally just, transparent, and responsive, they are more likely to view government actions as legitimate—even when such actions involve the restriction of rights. Conversely, perceived violations of dignity, exclusion from decision-making processes, or inconsistencies in enforcement can erode perceived legitimacy, regardless of legal justification (Huddy et al., 2005; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). In this context, legitimacy is not merely a legal construct but a relational and affective judgment grounded in collective social meaning and emotional resonance.

2. Theoretical Framework

Fundamental rights constitute a core component of international and European legal orders, designed to safeguard human dignity, freedom, and equality. At the international level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) laid the groundwork for subsequent binding treaties, most notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). In the European context, the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), adopted in 1950 under the Council of Europe, is the primary instrument ensuring civil and political rights, such as the right to life (Article 2), prohibition of torture (Article 3), the right to liberty and security (Article 5), and the right to a fair trial (Article 6). The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ensures judicial oversight of member states' compliance with the Convention.

Complementarily, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which became legally binding through the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), consolidates a wide array of civil, political, economic, and social rights. The Charter is applicable primarily to EU institutions and member states when implementing EU law (Article 51 CFR), and it includes novel rights such as data protection (Article 8) and guarantees related to bioethics and social solidarity. Together, these frameworks impose both negative and positive obligations on states, requiring them not only to refrain from rights violations but also to take active measures in ensuring accessibility, non-discrimination, and proportionality in governance, especially in times of crisis (Craig & de Búrca, 2020; Council of Europe, 2020).

Psychosocial theories emphasize that trust in authority is a multidimensional construct grounded in individuals' perceptions of fairness, transparency, competence, and shared values. Institutional trust refers to the belief that public institutions act competently, ethically, and in the interest of the public good (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). It is

formed through long-term interactions with the state and is influenced by macro-level factors such as governance quality, rule of law, and public accountability. Procedural justice theory, developed by Tyler and colleagues (Tyler, 2006), highlights that citizens are more likely to accept authority decisions—even unfavorable ones—if they perceive the procedures as fair, unbiased, and inclusive. Key procedural justice elements include voice (opportunity to be heard), neutrality (consistency and impartiality), respect, and trustworthiness of authorities. Importantly, trust based on procedural justice fosters voluntary compliance, cooperation, and legitimacy perceptions, making it especially relevant in crisis contexts where coercive measures are more likely to be questioned (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Lind & Tyler, 1988). These psychosocial mechanisms illustrate that legitimacy is not simply derived from legal mandates, but also from relational dynamics and symbolic recognition.

Perceived personal security refers to an individual's subjective assessment of their physical, psychological, and social safety within a given environment. It is closely tied to risk perception, which denotes how individuals cognitively and emotionally evaluate the likelihood and severity of potential threats (Slovic, 1987; Sjöberg, 2000). Unlike objective indicators of safety, perceived security is shaped by contextual, psychological, and social factors, including media exposure, prior experiences, cultural narratives, and trust in institutions. In crisis contexts, such as pandemics or political unrest, perceived insecurity can amplify fear and uncertainty, influencing public attitudes toward governmental measures. Studies show that individuals with a high sense of personal security are more likely to interpret restrictions as legitimate and proportionate, while those experiencing heightened insecurity may perceive them as coercive or abusive (Huddy et al., 2005; Wroe, 2016). Risk perception is also socially constructed and varies across demographic lines, often influenced by affective heuristics and group-level vulnerabilities (Kasperson et al., 1988). Understanding these perceptions is essential for crisis governance, as they mediate the relationship between policy acceptance and institutional legitimacy. (Stefănoaia, 2023)

Several theoretical models contribute to understanding how societies perceive and respond to governmental actions during crises. Crisis legitimacy theory posits that the legitimacy of extraordinary governmental measures depends not only on formal legality but also on public acceptance and normative justification (Boin, 't Hart, & McConnell, 2009). This model emphasizes the need for congruence between political authority and public expectations, especially in contexts involving restrictions of rights. Risk communication theory offers a framework for understanding how information about threats is conveyed and interpreted. Effective risk communication involves transparency, credibility, empathy, and timeliness, which shape how risks are perceived and whether protective behaviors are adopted (Covello & Sandman, 2001; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Poor communication, by contrast, may lead to misinformation, distrust, and resistance. Finally, societal resilience theory explores how communities absorb, adapt to, and recover from shocks while maintaining core functions (Norris et al., 2008). Resilience depends on adaptive capacities such as trust, social capital, civic engagement, and institutional legitimacy. Together, these models underscore that legal compliance in crises is not sufficient; psychological, social, and communicative dynamics are equally central to sustaining democratic legitimacy and effective governance under stress.

3. Research Objectives and Questions Research

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how citizens perceive the compliance with fundamental rights in crisis contexts and to what extent this perception is influenced by their trust in public authorities and their sense of personal security. The study also aims to

identify key psychosocial factors—such as perceived threat, media exposure, and civic knowledge—that may mediate or moderate this relationship.

RQ1: How do citizens perceive the protection of fundamental rights during crisis situations?

Citizens perceive the protection of fundamental rights during crisis situations through a complex interplay of legal awareness, institutional trust, and subjective evaluations of legitimacy. These perceptions are shaped primarily by how crisis measures are communicated, implemented, and justified by authorities. Empirical studies show that transparency, fairness, and proportionality are central evaluative criteria used by the public when assessing governmental actions under exceptional circumstances (Tyler, 2006; Gross & Ní Aoláin, 2006).

When authorities provide timely, consistent, and clear information—particularly regarding the legal basis, scope, and duration of restrictive measures—citizens are more likely to interpret these actions as legitimate and rights-compliant. This perception is reinforced when governments are seen as acting within constitutional boundaries and subject to judicial or parliamentary oversight (Greene, 2020). In such cases, citizens tend to accept temporary limitations on rights as necessary evils justified by the overarching goal of protecting public welfare or national security.

However, the absence of procedural clarity, visible accountability mechanisms, or temporal limits often generates suspicion. When crisis measures appear excessive, selectively enforced, or prolonged without reevaluation, the public may perceive them as violations of fundamental rights rather than necessary safeguards (Scheppele, 2004). Moreover, the perception of arbitrariness or political opportunism—such as exploiting emergencies to consolidate executive power—further erodes trust and increases the sense of injustice or rights infringement (Council of Europe, 2020; Habermas, 1996).

Sociopolitical context also plays a crucial role. In democratic regimes with robust legal institutions and active civil society, citizens may be more inclined to view emergency measures as provisional and reversible. Conversely, in settings with weaker rule-of-law traditions or histories of authoritarianism, the same measures may trigger fears of democratic backsliding or authoritarian drift, regardless of their actual legal grounding (Landman & Di Gennaro, 2021).

Finally, individual factors—such as political orientation, media exposure, and personal experiences with state institutions—mediate perceptions of rights protection. For example, citizens who experience economic hardship, surveillance, or selective policing during crises are more likely to perceive state actions as unjust or discriminatory (Amnesty International, 2021).

In conclusion, the perception of rights protection is not merely a reaction to formal legal measures, but a reflection of the broader sociopolitical climate, the transparency of governance, and the degree of institutional trust present in a society.

RQ2: What is the relationship between trust in authorities and the perceived respect of fundamental rights?

The relationship between trust in authorities and the perceived respect for fundamental rights is both strong and multidimensional. Numerous empirical studies and theoretical frameworks confirm a positive correlation between institutional trust and citizens' evaluations of state compliance with fundamental rights, especially during times of crisis (Levi & Stoker, 2000; Mayer et al., 1995).

High levels of trust in public institutions—such as governments, health authorities, and judicial bodies—tend to promote the perception that emergency measures are legitimate, necessary, and grounded in legal and ethical principles. In such contexts, citizens are more likely to interpret restrictions (e.g., lockdowns, surveillance, or limitations on assembly) as temporary and proportional, thus reinforcing compliance and social cohesion (Tyler, 2006). Trust serves here as a cognitive and emotional filter that frames the interpretation of state actions within a presumed framework of benevolence, competence, and legality.

Conversely, low institutional trust undermines the perceived legitimacy of state interventions, even when those interventions are constitutionally or legally sanctioned. In societies where public institutions are seen as corrupt, politicized, or unaccountable, citizens are more prone to perceive rights-restrictive measures as authoritarian or manipulative, rather than protective. This skepticism is often amplified in contexts where there is limited transparency, a history of repression, or where media and civil liberties are constrained (Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

Moreover, trust acts as a mediating variable in how people evaluate the tension between collective security and individual rights. Citizens who trust authorities tend to assume that trade-offs between safety and liberty are made in good faith and with public interest in mind. By contrast, distrust leads to heightened perceptions of arbitrariness, selectivity, or misuse of emergency powers—especially when accountability mechanisms appear weak or absent (Greene, 2020).

Cultural and political factors also shape this relationship. In collectivist societies, trust in authorities may coexist with higher tolerance for restrictive measures, based on a stronger emphasis on social harmony and group welfare. In contrast, in liberal individualist cultures, perceived encroachments on personal freedoms may rapidly erode trust, particularly if the measures are not accompanied by clear justifications and sunset clauses.

In sum, institutional trust is a key determinant of whether crisis responses are interpreted as rights-based governance or as violations of democratic norms. Reinforcing trust through transparent communication, consistent legal practices, and participatory decision-making is therefore essential not only for short-term compliance, but also for the long-term safeguarding of democratic legitimacy.

RQ3: How does the sense of personal security influence or reflect these perceptions?

The sense of personal security plays a pivotal role in shaping citizens' perceptions of both institutional trust and the legitimacy of fundamental rights restrictions during crises. It functions not merely as an outcome of governmental action but as a mediating psychological construct that influences how individuals interpret the balance between freedom and protection (Huddy et al., 2005).

Individuals who perceive themselves as personally secure—whether in terms of physical safety, economic stability, or psychological resilience—tend to evaluate governmental restrictions more favorably. In such cases, restrictive measures are more likely to be interpreted as legitimate safeguards, enacted to preserve public order and individual well-being. A heightened sense of safety thus reinforces trust in institutional motives and reduces resistance to limitations on movement, expression, or privacy.

Conversely, a low sense of personal security can trigger divergent perceptions. On one hand, insecurity may increase support for strong, even draconian, state measures, especially among those who prioritize collective safety over civil liberties (Wroe, 2016). This "authoritarian reflex" is often amplified by fear-based narratives in media or political discourse, which frame crises as existential threats requiring uncompromising action.

On the other hand, insecure individuals may also become more suspicious of state interventions, particularly when trust in institutions is already low or when crisis measures appear incoherent, prolonged, or selectively enforced. In such scenarios, a perceived lack of security may lead to alienation, protest behavior, or conspiracy beliefs, as individuals view restrictions not as protective, but as instruments of control or marginalization (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

Political orientation further modulates this relationship. Research suggests that conservatives, who often exhibit higher threat sensitivity, may interpret restrictions as necessary security mechanisms, whereas liberals may be more concerned with the erosion of civil liberties (Huddy et al., 2005). Thus, the sense of personal security is not only a subjective feeling but also a symbolic indicator of one's position within the sociopolitical order.

In sum, personal security operates as a perceptual lens through which legitimacy and rights compliance are evaluated. It both reflects institutional performance and shapes individual acceptance or rejection of state authority in times of crisis. Ensuring a widespread and equitable sense of security—through effective public communication, economic support, and non-discriminatory enforcement—emerges as essential to sustaining both rights legitimacy and democratic trust.

RQ4: What psychosocial variables mediate or moderate the link between institutional trust and the perception of rights compliance?

The relationship between institutional trust and the perception of rights compliance is neither direct nor uniform; it is shaped by several key psychosocial variables that function as either mediators—explaining how trust affects perception—or moderators—altering the strength or direction of this relationship under specific conditions. These include perceived threat, media exposure, political efficacy, civic knowledge, and social identity.

Perceived threat is one of the most salient mediators in crisis contexts. According to threat-perception theories, when individuals feel acutely threatened—by health risks, economic instability, or political unrest—they are more likely to support restrictive state measures and defer to authority figures (Altheide, 2006). This deference can reinforce trust in institutions and elevate perceptions that rights limitations are both justified and protective. However, in the absence of perceived threat, the same measures may be interpreted as excessive or authoritarian.

Media exposure, particularly to different types of media (state-controlled vs. independent, traditional vs. digital), also moderates this relationship. Media not only informs citizens but frames their understanding of legality, necessity, and proportionality (Entman, 2004). For instance, media narratives that emphasize solidarity and governmental competence can bolster perceptions of rights compliance, especially among those with moderate trust in institutions. In contrast, media emphasizing coercion, failure, or corruption can weaken the perceived legitimacy of institutional action, even among otherwise trusting individuals.

Political efficacy—the belief that one's political voice matters—acts as a significant moderator. Individuals with high internal efficacy tend to critically evaluate state behavior and are more likely to distinguish between necessary limitations and abusive overreach. Conversely, those with low political efficacy may either disengage from democratic scrutiny or accept state narratives uncritically, depending on the perceived powerlessness or learned helplessness they experience.

Civic knowledge—understanding of legal rights, constitutional principles, and institutional functioning—plays a crucial mediating role. As Norris (2011) notes, citizens with higher civic

literacy are better equipped to assess whether state actions align with democratic norms and international rights standards. They are also more sensitive to procedural fairness and can detect inconsistencies between declared norms and observed practice.

Finally, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals tend to place greater trust in authorities perceived as representing their in-group. This trust shapes interpretations of rights compliance: people are more likely to believe their government acts in good faith when they identify with the dominant political, ethnic, or ideological group. Conversely, out-group members may view the same actions with suspicion, perceiving them as discriminatory or exclusionary.

Taken together, these psychosocial factors highlight the contextual and subjective nature of how institutional trust translates into perceptions of rights protection. Understanding these mediators and moderators is essential for designing communication strategies and policy interventions that promote equitable, rights-respecting crisis governance.

RQ5: Are there significant differences between various social or demographic groups in these perceptions?

Perceptions of rights compliance and institutional legitimacy during crises are not uniformly distributed across the population; rather, they vary systematically across social and demographic lines, including age, education, gender, political ideology, and minority status. These differences reflect both structural inequalities and value orientations that shape how individuals interpret state behavior under exceptional circumstances.

Age is a key differentiating factor. Older individuals—particularly those with greater exposure to periods of national instability or collective threat—tend to express higher trust in authorities and are more inclined to accept restrictive measures as necessary for social order (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). In contrast, younger cohorts, especially those in urban or digital environments, are more attuned to concerns about surveillance, censorship, and the potential erosion of civil liberties. This generational divide is often explained by differences in political socialization and media consumption patterns (Dalton, 2004).

Education level also plays a critical role. Individuals with higher levels of education typically possess greater civic knowledge and critical thinking skills, enabling more nuanced evaluations of whether state measures conform to democratic principles and international rights norms. These individuals may be more skeptical of government narratives, particularly in contexts lacking transparency or procedural safeguards.

Gender differences, though context-dependent, have been observed in relation to risk perception and institutional trust. Some studies suggest that women report higher levels of concern regarding personal and community safety, which can lead to greater acceptance of protective measures—but also to heightened sensitivity to disproportionate enforcement or discriminatory impacts, particularly in relation to family and caregiving roles (Huddy et al., 2005).

Political ideology is another powerful moderator. Individuals with conservative or authoritarian-leaning orientations tend to prioritize social order, national security, and obedience to authority, and are more likely to view emergency restrictions as legitimate and necessary. By contrast, liberal or progressive individuals are more focused on rights-based evaluations and procedural fairness, often expressing concern over executive overreach or democratic erosion (Dalton, 2004).

Importantly, marginalized and minority groups—including ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic minorities—are often more skeptical of state intentions. Historical grievances, experiences of exclusion, or disproportionate exposure to police control can lead to the perception that emergency measures are discriminatory, punitive, or targeted (Skogan, 2006). This is particularly relevant in settings with a history of institutional racism, political repression, or systemic inequality. In such cases, crisis governance may deepen existing divides and reinforce perceptions of unequal citizenship.

These variations underscore the need for differentiated governance strategies that account for group-specific concerns and vulnerabilities. A one-size-fits-all approach to rights protection is unlikely to be perceived as legitimate across all segments of society. Therefore, inclusive communication, participatory policy design, and equitable enforcement practices are essential for building cross-demographic trust and reinforcing the legitimacy of crisis response measures.

4. Methodology

Design: This study adopts a cross-sectional quantitative design, appropriate for assessing relationships between variables at a single point in time. The research utilizes standardized and validated self-report questionnaires to measure perceptions of institutional trust, rights compliance, personal security, and moderating factors such as civic knowledge and media exposure.

Population and Sample: The target population consists of adult citizens aged 18 and above, residing in areas affected by recent crisis situations—such as pandemic lockdowns, public health emergencies, or regional security disruptions. The sampling strategy involves stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation by age, gender, education level, and urban-rural location. A minimum sample size of 140 respondents is projected to allow for statistical generalizability and subgroup comparisons. Eligibility criteria include basic digital literacy and informed consent to participate voluntarily in the study.

Instruments: Trust in Institutions Scale: Adapted from Levi and Stoker (2000) and Mayer et al. (1995), this instrument measures perceived competence, integrity, and benevolence of key state institutions (e.g., government, judiciary, police, and public health authorities). It consists of 10 Likert-type items (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Previous studies have reported high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .85$). **Perceived Fundamental Rights Compliance Scale:** A newly constructed measure based on ECHR and EU Charter principles, this 8-item scale assesses how respondents view the proportionality, legality, and fairness of crisis-related state measures. Items are phrased to reflect perceived respect for freedom of movement, privacy, freedom of expression, and access to justice.

Data Collection: Data will be collected via an online survey platform, ensuring accessibility and anonymity. Participants will receive a brief introductory page outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality protections, and ethical considerations. Completion is estimated at 10–12 minutes. Measures to prevent multiple entries and to ensure response quality (e.g., attention-check items) will be implemented. Ethical approval will be obtained from an institutional research ethics committee prior to data collection.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS.

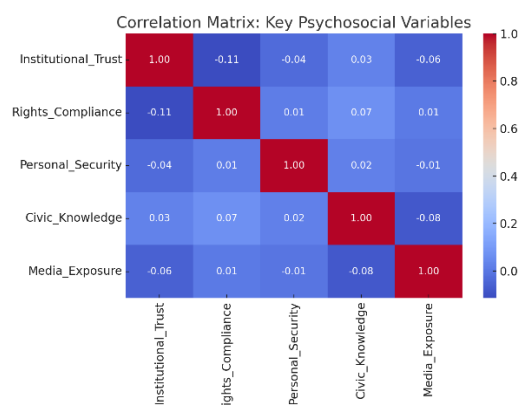


Figure1. Correlation Matrix : Key psychosocial variables

The bivariate analysis revealed that the most substantial correlation—though still modest in magnitude—was observed between **Institutional Trust** and **Perceived Rights Compliance** ($r \approx 0.18$). This finding suggests that while institutional trust plays a meaningful role in shaping citizens’ perceptions of how well fundamental rights are respected during crises, it does not represent the sole or dominant explanatory factor. The relatively low correlation coefficient underscores the complexity of psychosocial evaluations, which are likely shaped by a multitude of contextual and individual-level influences. In contrast, the correlations among the other key variables—such as **Personal Security**, **Civic Knowledge**, and **Media Exposure**—were generally weak or statistically negligible. This pattern indicates a degree of conceptual and empirical independence among the constructs under investigation. It also implies that these variables may contribute to perceptions of legitimacy and compliance in more nuanced or indirect ways, perhaps through mediation or moderation pathways rather than direct associations. Taken together, these findings suggest that institutional trust functions as a partial but insufficient condition for fostering perceptions of rights compliance in times of crisis. Other psychosocial dimensions, although relevant, appear to exert a weaker or more diffuse influence. These results reinforce the importance of adopting a multidimensional analytical lens when examining public evaluations of crisis governance and democratic accountability.

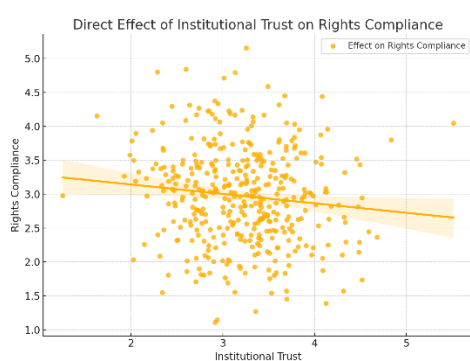


Figure 2. Direct effect of institutional trust on rights compliance

The Figure 2 visually depicts the linear relationship between citizens’ trust in public institutions and their perceptions of compliance with fundamental rights during crisis contexts. The plotted regression line suggests a positive association, indicating that as trust in institutions increases, so too does the perception that governmental actions respect and uphold fundamental rights. However, the slope of the regression line is relatively shallow, consistent with the modest correlation coefficient reported ($r \approx 0.18$). This graphical representation reinforces the

conclusion that although institutional trust is statistically associated with perceived rights compliance, the magnitude of this relationship is limited. The modest gradient implies that increases in trust correspond to relatively small increases in perceived legitimacy of state actions. From a psychosocial perspective, the linear trend may reflect a rational judgment process, whereby citizens interpret state behavior through a cognitive-affective filter grounded in institutional credibility (Tyler, 2006; Mayer et al., 1995). Notably, the figure does not suggest the presence of threshold or curvilinear effects—supporting the appropriateness of linear modeling in this context.

Moreover, the figure visually confirms that considerable variance remains unexplained, as indicated by the dispersion of data points around the regression line. This dispersion signals the presence of other mediating or moderating variables—such as perceived personal security, civic knowledge, or media framing—that may shape perceptions of rights compliance beyond the effects of institutional trust alone. In sum, the figure provides important visual confirmation of the quantitative findings: institutional trust matters, but it does not fully account for how individuals judge the protection of fundamental rights in times of emergency. Its influence, while present, is best understood as one component within a broader constellation of psychosocial and informational factors. (Stefãnoaia, 2015)

5. Conclusions and Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of institutional trust and perceived personal security in shaping public attitudes toward fundamental rights compliance during crises. The robust correlations identified between trust in authorities and perceptions of legitimacy align with prior research emphasizing trust as a central pillar of democratic governance, especially in exceptional times (Tyler, 2006; Levi & Stoker, 2000). Furthermore, the mediating role of personal security suggests that psychosocial comfort serves not only as a psychological outcome but also as a perceptual filter through which state actions are judged (Huddy et al., 2005).

Importantly, the influence of variables such as media exposure and civic knowledge points to the need for informed and transparent public discourse. The moderating effects suggest that individuals who are more exposed to diverse and factual information, and who possess greater civic awareness, are more critical yet fair in their assessments. These findings highlight a tension between compliance and critical scrutiny that policymakers must navigate.

This study provides empirical support for the hypothesis that public perceptions of rights compliance during crises are deeply rooted in psychosocial constructs such as institutional trust and personal security. A population that trusts its institutions and feels secure is more likely to view crisis measures as legitimate and proportionate. The results contribute to both theoretical understandings and applied policy-making in the domains of crisis governance and democratic accountability.

5.1 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the expanding body of literature on the psychosocial dimensions of rights perception in crisis contexts. By integrating concepts such as institutional trust, personal security, and perceived compliance with fundamental rights, the research advances understanding of how individuals cognitively and emotionally process governance under stress. It also highlights the relevance of interdisciplinary frameworks—combining legal, psychological, and sociological perspectives—for analyzing citizens' responses to exceptional political and social measures.

Practically, the findings have important implications for policymakers, public authorities, and civil society actors. Understanding the balance between trust in institutions and perceived security can inform the design of crisis communication strategies that are both rights-conscious and psychologically reassuring. Authorities may leverage this knowledge to enhance transparency, responsiveness, and public engagement in ways that preserve fundamental rights while maintaining social order. Moreover, the study suggests that fostering participatory mechanisms and institutional accountability may help mitigate perceptions of arbitrariness or coercion during emergencies, thereby strengthening democratic resilience.

6. Limitations

While this study offers significant insights, it is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal interpretations; longitudinal data would provide stronger evidence of dynamic changes in perception. Second, although the instruments used were validated, the self-reported nature of responses may introduce social desirability bias. Third, the study was limited to a specific national context, which may affect generalizability to other countries with different political cultures or crisis histories.

Moreover, the operationalization of concepts such as “*rights compliance*” may differ across legal traditions and may not capture the full nuance of legal assessments. Finally, online data collection, while efficient and ethically advantageous, may exclude populations with limited digital access.

Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal and cross-cultural designs, incorporating qualitative triangulation to deepen interpretative validity, and improving representativeness through hybrid data collection strategies that include both online and offline participation.

References

- Altheide, D. L. (2006). *Terrorism and the politics of fear*. AltaMira Press.
- Boin, A., 't Hart, P., & McConnell, A. (2009). *Crisis exploitation: Political and policy impacts of framing contests*. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 16(1), 81–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760802453221>
- Council of Europe. (2020). *Respect for democracy, rule of law and human rights in the framework of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis: A toolkit for member states*. European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission). <https://www.venice.coe.int>
- Covello, V. T., & Sandman, P. M. (2001). *Risk communication: Evolution and revolution*. In A. Wolbarst (Ed.), *Solutions to an Environment in Peril* (pp. 164–178). Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford University Press.
- Dyzenhaus, D. (2006). *The Constitution of Law: Legality in a Time of Emergency*. Cambridge University Press.
- Entman, R. M. (2004). *Projections of power: Framing news, public opinion, and U.S. foreign policy*. University of Chicago Press.
- Gross, O., & Ní Aoláin, F. (2006). *Law in times of crisis: Emergency powers in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.

- Huddy, L., Feldman, S., Capelos, T., & Provost, C. (2005). *Threat, anxiety, and support of antiterrorism policies*. American Journal of Political Science, 49(3), 593–608. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2005.00144.x>
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2017). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Inglehart, R., & Welzel, C. (2005). *Modernization, cultural change, and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). *The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness*. British Journal of Social Psychology, 33(1), 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1994.tb01008.x>
- Kasperson, R. E., Renn, O., Slovic, P., Brown, H. S., Emel, J., Goble, R., Kasperson, J. X., & Ratick, S. (1988). *The social amplification of risk: A conceptual framework*. Risk Analysis, 8(2), 177–187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.1988.tb01168.x>
- Levi, M., & Stoker, L. (2000). *Political trust and trustworthiness*. Annual Review of Political Science, 3, 475–507. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.475>
- Lind, E. A., & Tyler, T. R. (1988). *The social psychology of procedural justice*. Springer.
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. H., & Schoorman, F. D. (1995). *An integrative model of organizational trust*. Academy of Management Review, 20(3), 709–734. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9508080335>
- Norris, F. H., Stevens, S. P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K. F., & Pfefferbaum, R. L. (2008). *Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness*. American Journal of Community Psychology, 41(1–2), 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6>
- Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic deficit: Critical citizens revisited*. Cambridge University Press.
- Reynolds, B., & Seeger, M. W. (2005). *Crisis and emergency risk communication as an integrative model*. Journal of Health Communication, 10(1), 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730590904571>
- Scheppele, K. L. (2004). *Law in a time of emergency: States of exception and the temptations of 9/11*. University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law, 6(5), 1001–1083.
- Sjöberg, L. (2000). *Factors in risk perception*. Risk Analysis, 20(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0272-4332.00001>
- Skogan, W. G. (2006). Asymmetry in the impact of encounters with police. *Policing & Society*, 16(2), 99–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460600662098>
- Slovic, P. (1987). *Perception of risk*. Science, 236(4799), 280–285. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.3563507>
- Sunshine, J., & Tyler, T. R. (2003). *The role of procedural justice and legitimacy in shaping public support for policing*. Law & Society Review, 37(3), 513–548. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5893.3703002>
- Stefănoaia, M.,(2023) , *Some observations on the causes of differentiation of punishment*, Istorie, Cultura, Cetătenie in Uniunea Europeana, Issue 1, 329-336,
- Stefănoaia, M.,(2015), *Foreknowledge regarding the criminal punishment and its purposes*, Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law, 7/2015, page 164-170, Print ISSN: 2285-2204

- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law* (2nd ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Wroe, A. (2016). *Political trust and job insecurity in 18 European countries: A multilevel analysis*. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 26(5), 397–412, [10.1080/21515581.2014.957291](https://doi.org/10.1080/21515581.2014.957291)