

DANI SANDU

Political behavior · party activists · political identity · democratic resilience · field and natural experiments

Postdoctoral Fellow, University of Fribourg · daniel.sandu@unifr.ch · danisandu.eu · ORCID · Google Scholar

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Political behavior; social and political identity; partisanship and party activists; democratic resilience; the populist radical right; European studies; Central and Eastern Europe.

Methods: field and natural experiments, panel surveys, text as data, mixed methods.

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Postdoctoral Fellow, European Studies, University of Fribourg 2024–present

Coordinator of WP2 in SNSF project *Liberal Democratic Commitment in Europe: Mass Attitudes, Political Identity, and Behavioural Consequences* (PI: Natasha Wunsch), 2025–present

Guest Researcher, Department of Political Science, University of Basel 2025–present

Postdoctoral Researcher, Institute of Political Science, Chemnitz University of Technology 2023–2024

Fritz Thyssen Stiftung project *Legacies of Democratic Transition: Explaining the Success of the Populist Radical Right in Eastern Germany* (with Arndt Leininger)

Guest Researcher, Data Science Lab, Hertie School, Berlin

EDUCATION

PhD in Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute, Florence 2017–2023

Dissertation: *Same History, Different Stories: A Comparison of East and West German History Textbooks*, defended September 2023

Committee: Elias Dinas (EUI, supervisor), Filip Kostelka (EUI), Grigore Pop-Eleches (Princeton), Anja Neundorff (Glasgow)

Visiting PhD student, New York University, 2019–2020

MA in Political Sociology, University of Cincinnati (Fulbright Scholar) 2010–2012

Graduate Certificate in Public Opinion and Survey Research, 2012

BA in Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Bucharest 2005–2008

BOOK PROJECT

Same History, Different Stories: Political Indoctrination through National History Education in East and West Germany. Book manuscript based on the dissertation; book proposal in progress.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

Co-authored work with C. Ciobanu, K. Krakowski and J. S. Morales is equal contribution, with authors listed alphabetically.

“What Can Depolarize the Polarizers? Affective Polarization for Party Activists Before and After Elections.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 2025, 58(6): 1101–1140 (with Costin Ciobanu).

“Violence Against Politicians, Negative Campaigning, and Public Opinion: Evidence from Poland.” *Comparative Political Studies*, 2022, 55(12): 2086–2118 (with Krzysztof Krakowski and Juan S. Morales).

Before the PhD

“The Complicated Relation Between News Frames and Political Trust: A Case Study of Romania.” *Central European Political Studies Review*, 2016, 18(2–3): 122–140 (with Mădălina Boțan and Nicoleta Corbu).

“Candidates with Easy Access Get More Favorable Coverage.” *Newspaper Research Journal*, 2015, 36(2): 253–264 (with David Niven).

WORKING PAPERS

“Partisans at the Polls: Election Monitoring and Satisfaction with Democracy among Party Activists.” (with Costin Ciobanu) **Job market paper**.

- “Which Threats Mobilize? Evidence from Six Large-Scale Experiments with Party Supporters” (with Costin Ciobanu and Krzysztof Krakowski). Under review.
- “Lonely on the Land: Surplus Males and Support for the Radical Right” (with Mark A. Kayser, Arndt Leininger, Jan Menzner, Hanna Schwander and Thomas Tichelbaecker). Under review.
- “Partisan Push Sorting and the Far Right: A Vicious Circle in Eastern Germany” (with Arndt Leininger, Mark A. Kayser and Thomas Tichelbaecker). Working paper.
- “When Populists Win: Affective Polarization and the Logic of Selective Depolarization” (with Costin Ciobanu and Krzysztof Krakowski). Working paper.

WORK IN PROGRESS (WITH RESULTS)

- “Negotiating Democracy: Cross-Partisan Deliberation and Democratic Attitudes in Four European Countries” (with Hannah Groennou and Natasha Wunsch). Lead author; pre-registered.
- “When the Scandal Breaks: A Sexual Harassment Investigation and Students’ Gender and Political Divides” (with Costin Ciobanu). Lead author; pre-registered.

BOOK CHAPTERS AND ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRIES

- “Romania: Big Crisis, Small Response.” In Dorothee Bohle, Edgars Eihmanis and Alen Toplišek (eds.), *The Political Economy of COVID-19 Responses in East Central Europe*. Florence: European University Institute, 2022 (with Nils Oellerich).
- “Polarization and Pluralism” and “Populism.” In Raluca Radu and Mihai Coman (eds.), *101 Concepte în Mass-Media* [101 Concepts in Mass Media] (Forthcoming, in Romanian).

POLICY REPORTS (SELECTION)

- Democratic Resilience Index*. Global Focus Center, 2020 (PI and editor).
- Propaganda Made to Measure: How Our Vulnerabilities Facilitate Russian Influence*. Global Focus Center, 2018 (co-author and editor).
- Youth Study Romania*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2014 and 2019 (co-author).
- European Comparative Study on the Intra-European Mobility and Migration of Youth in Romania*. Novapolis, 2015 (co-author).
- Commercial Sex Work: Stigma and Marginalization* (in Romanian). Carusel, 2015 (lead author).

GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Research Pool grant, University of Fribourg (CHF 70,000; co-PI with Natasha Wunsch)	2025–2026
Research grant, Fritz Thyssen Stiftung (€100,000; co-applicant, PI: Arndt Leininger)	2023–2025
EUI mobility grant for a research visit to New York University (€15,000)	2019–2020
PhD scholarship, European University Institute (€73,000)	2017–2023
Fulbright Scholarship for graduate study at the University of Cincinnati (US\$100,000)	2010–2012
Aspen Young Leaders Fellow, Aspen Institute Romania (2015) and Aspen Institute Italia (2016)	2015–2016
Bucerius Summer School on Global Governance, ZEIT-Stiftung, Hamburg	2016

FIELDWORK AND ORIGINAL DATA COLLECTION

Party activists and elections in Romania (with C. Ciobanu; K. Krakowski since 2024)	2020–2025
<i>Partner:</i> USR (Save Romania Union), in collaboration with the party leadership and its membership organization	
<i>Scope:</i> pre-registered three-wave panels around the 2020 parliamentary election (8,300 responses) and the 2024 presidential election (35,000+ responses); six pre-registered mobilization experiments in the 2024 European, presidential and parliamentary campaigns, reaching nearly 400,000 supporters (46,418 responses); 20 interviews with polling-station delegates	
<i>Role:</i> co-PI; liaison with the party; survey and experiment design	

A sexual harassment scandal and student attitudes (with C. Ciobanu)	2023–2024
<i>Scope:</i> pre-registered three-wave panel of social science students at the University of Bucharest (target population ≈4,000), fielded around the publication of a year-long media investigation into a professor	
<i>Role:</i> lead; design, fieldwork coordination, analysis	
Democratic commitment as political identity (SNSF, PI: N. Wunsch)	2025–present
<i>Scope:</i> 16 deliberative focus groups in Finland, France, Italy and Poland, each embedded in a three-wave panel, with a matched online control group (≈1,200); a three-wave election panel in four countries (2026–2028)	
<i>Fieldwork:</i> GIM Suisse and local partners; Prolific.	
<i>Role:</i> WP coordinator; design, pre-registration, analysis	
Legacies of Democratic Transition: Explaining the Success of the Populist Radical Right in Eastern Germany (Fritz Thyssen Stiftung; with A. Leininger)	2023–2025
<i>Scope:</i> pre-registered multiple survey waves (8,300 responses), with individual survey experiments embedded	
<i>Role:</i> co-applicant; design, pre-registration, analysis	

TEACHING

University of Fribourg (instructor; all courses taught in English)

Research Design in Political Science (MA; co-taught with Natasha Wunsch)	2024, 2025, 2026
Comparative Politics of Central and Eastern Europe (BA/MA)	2024, 2025
Introduction to Data Collection (MA)	2025
Political Culture, Norms and Identity (MA; co-taught with Natasha Wunsch)	2026
Writing and Research with Artificial Intelligence (BA, block course)	2026
Thesis supervision: 1 MA theses (supervisor); 3 MA students (thesis tutoring)	2024–2026

Other institutions

Comparative Politics of Central and Eastern Europe, University of Florence, TU Darmstadt	2022, 2023
Teaching assistant, Causal Inference with Observational Data; Survey Experiments, EUI	2022
Guest lectures and seminars, University of Bucharest	2019, 2021, 2022

Professional training

Seminars and trainings for the Aspen Institute Romania, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, European Commission and World Bank	2013–2022
--	-----------

INVITED TALKS AND WORKSHOPS

2026	ETH Zurich, European Politics Colloquium; ETH Zurich, European Politics Summer Retreat; University of Basel
2025	ETH Zurich, European Politics Colloquium; ETH Zurich, European Politics Summer Retreat; KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
2024	EUI, Political Behaviour Colloquium; ETH Zurich, European Politics Summer Retreat; ETH Zurich/University of Zurich, SPSA Colloquium; University of Bonn, Book Workshop; University of Zurich – Democratic Backsliding Summer School
2023	EUI, Political Behaviour Colloquium; Goethe University Frankfurt, Urban–Rural Divides Workshop; University of Mannheim (MZES); Berlin-Brandenburg Political Behavior Workshop; University of Florence
2022	Sciences Po, Affective Polarization Workshop, Paris; EUI, Political Behaviour Colloquium
2019	Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

American Political Science Association (APSA)	2022, 2024, 2026
European Political Science Association (EPSA)	2020–2025
European Political Science Society (EPSS)	2026
Swiss Political Science Association (SPSA)	2025, 2026

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Referee for Comparative Political Studies, Electoral Studies and Political Studies	
Co-organizer (with Natasha Wunsch), research colloquium, University of Fribourg	2024–2026
Co-organizer (with Natasha Wunsch and Christian Freudlsperger), workshop at the Swiss Political Science Association, University of Zurich and ETH	2024
Co-convenor, Survey and Field Experiments workshop, European University Institute	2021
Co-convenor, Panel Data Analysis workshop, European University Institute	2019

METHODS TRAINING

Survey and Field Experiments	2021
Computational Methods for Text Analysis, EUI	2020
Panel Data Analysis	2019
EITM Summer School (Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models), Turin	2019
Research and Computational Methods Summer School, Thessaloniki	2018

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Co-founder, Factual.ro, Romania's first fact-checking platform	2013
TEDx Bucharest speaker, "Automation: Social Risks and Opportunities"	2016
Moderator and panelist at public events of the World Bank, the European Commission and the Aspen Institute Romania	since 2013
Op-eds and commentary for independent Romanian and international media: Hotnews.ro, PressOne, Adevarul, The Economist, Le Monde, El Pais, NPR	

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Consultant and Policy Advisor , World Bank, Romania: community assessment of marginalized populations in Romania; vaccination uptake study with the World Bank's behavioral science unit; Romania's National Roma Integration Strategy	2015–2022
Research Coordinator , Global Focus Center, Bucharest: Democratic Resilience Index; resistance to propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe (funded by the German Marshall Fund and the European Commission)	2018–2021
Consultant , Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Romania	2013–2020
Consultant , Aspen Institute Romania	2013–2018

LANGUAGES AND SOFTWARE

Languages: Romanian (native), English (fluent), French (fluent), Italian (fluent), German (basic), Spanish (basic)

Software: R, Stata, Qualtrics, QGIS, LaTeX, Python.

REFERENCES

Elias Dinas, Professor of Political Science, European University Institute · elias.dinas@eui.eu
Arndt Leininger, Professor of Political Science, University of Hamburg · arndt.leininger@uni-hamburg.de
Natasha Wunsch, Professor of European Studies, University of Fribourg · natasha.wunsch@unifr.ch
Filip Kostelka, Professor of Political and Social Change, European University Institute · filip.kostelka@eui.eu

Last updated: October 2026