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Security and Resilience in Romania's Railway Infrastructure (1869–2022)

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INTRODUCTION

The thesis analyses the security and resilience of Romania's railway infrastructure over the period 1869–2022, starting from the premise that the evolution of the railways cannot be explained solely by technical, economic or technological factors. Railway infrastructure is treated as critical infrastructure, a political artefact and an indicator of state capacity, because its development, deterioration or modernisation reflects political decisions, institutional arrangements and regime changes. From this perspective, security denotes the set of mechanisms through which threats are prevented and managed, while resilience expresses the system's capacity to absorb disruption, adapt and maintain its essential functions (Baldwin, 1997; Bruneau et al., 2003).

The research addresses two main questions. The first concerns the political and institutional factors that influenced railway development between 1869 and 2022. The second concerns the institutional factors that shaped railway safety, security and resilience policies during the same period. The choice of an extended historical perspective makes it possible to identify continuities and breaks in governance, as well as mechanisms of path dependence through which earlier decisions continue to produce effects on institutions and infrastructure (Pierson, 2000).

The methodology is qualitative, interdisciplinary and historical-comparative. It combines documentary analysis, historical-institutional analysis and critical security analysis, drawing on academic literature, national and European legislation, official documents, historical data and institutional reports. The longitudinal design makes it possible to relate railway development to changes in political regime, economic model and administrative capacity. Within this framework, infrastructure is viewed as an expression of the state's 'infrastructural power', namely the capacity of political authority to organise territory and provide essential services (Mann, 1984). Historical studies of the Romanian railways likewise confirm the relationship between network development, state-building and the geopolitical context (Turnock, 2001; Dungaciu & Dumitrescu, 2017).

The overall aim is to build an integrated analytical model explaining railway security and resilience through the interaction of governance, institutional capacity and historical development. Unlike sectoral approaches, the thesis combines institutional history, critical security studies and public policy analysis. It is structured in four chapters: the conceptual foundations of resilience; railway development and its political determinants; the operationalisation of security, safety and resilience through three critical schools; and the general conclusions, recommendations, contributions and limitations. The analysis shows that railway performance is inseparable from the quality of governance.

CHAPTER I. RAILWAY RESILIENCE AS AN OUTCOME OF POLITICAL GOVERNANCE

The first chapter establishes the conceptual foundations of resilience and shows that its meaning has evolved from the idea of returning after a shock towards a complex capacity for adaptation, reorganisation, learning and transformation. In the ecological tradition, resilience denotes the capacity of a system to absorb disturbances without losing its basic functions (Holling, 1973). In the literature on critical infrastructure, the concept is broadened to include elements such as robustness, redundancy, speed of recovery and coordination capacity. Applied to the railway sector, resilience refers not only to the resistance of tracks, bridges, installations or rolling stock, but also to the functioning of the institutions that plan, finance, maintain and manage the network.

The thesis highlights that critical infrastructures are interdependent systems and that disruption to rail transport can affect mobility, the economy, logistics, energy, communications and the state's response capacity. Resilience must therefore be analysed in relation to prevention, risk management and the continuity of essential services. The specialist literature treats infrastructure resilience as a combination of the capacity to absorb a shock and the capacity subsequently to recover or adapt (Bruneau et al., 2003). In the railway sector, recent research emphasises the importance of infrastructure restoration, traffic management, redundancy and operational planning (Bešinović, 2020).

A central contribution of the chapter, however, lies in shifting the emphasis from a predominantly technical approach towards a political and institutional one. Resilience is viewed as an outcome of governance: institutions must anticipate risks, cooperate, allocate resources and learn from crises. In this logic, political decisions can strengthen or erode resilience even when the material infrastructure remains unchanged. The literature on resilience and security also shows that these capacities are built through practices, norms and institutional relationships, not merely through technical investment (Dunn Cavelty et al., 2015). Railway resilience thus becomes an indicator of administrative maturity and of the state's strategic continuity.

The chapter distinguishes resilience from related concepts such as robustness, adaptability and transformability. These capture partial dimensions that resilience brings together. For railway infrastructure, political relevance arises precisely in the choice of priorities: which assets are protected, where redundancy exists, which services are maintained and who bears the costs of disruption. Consequently, resilience cannot be institutionally neutral, because it depends on rules, responsibilities and institutional coordination. This interpretation prepares the ground for the historical analysis of variations in resilience in Romania.

In applying the concept to railway infrastructure, the thesis begins from the idea that the functioning of the system depends both on its physical components and on the relationships between institutions, operators, users and other critical infrastructures. Interdependencies between transport, energy, telecommunications and digital systems mean that a local disruption can generate cascading effects, requiring integrated risk governance (Rinaldi et al., 2001). Resilience therefore entails preventive maintenance, safe signalling

systems, emergency protocols, trained staff, operational recovery capacity and coordination mechanisms capable of functioning before, during and after a crisis.

The chapter shows that railway resilience can be interpreted differently through the three critical schools of security used later in the thesis. In the logic of the Copenhagen School, infrastructure becomes a priority when it is politically framed as a vulnerable strategic object. From the perspective of the Paris School, resilience is produced through expertise, procedures, standardisation, risk assessment and everyday administrative practices. The Aberystwyth perspective complements the analysis through its social dimension: technical continuity is insufficient if access to mobility, user protection and the reduction of community vulnerabilities are ignored.

For the Romanian case, the chapter concludes that resilience has varied with models of governance. In periods characterised by centralisation, long-term planning and administrative control, such as the monarchical era and the socialist regime, the system displayed a greater capacity for organisation and continuity. After 1990, inconsistent reforms, institutional fragmentation and the absence of a stable strategy contributed to the erosion of this capacity. Resilience is therefore treated as a political and institutional outcome, rather than as an autonomous property of infrastructure.

This conclusion has direct implications for public policy. Strengthening resilience requires stable institutions, cooperation among actors, predictable funding and adaptive policies. Effective policy implementation is facilitated by collaborative mechanisms and by the capacity of actors to coordinate decision-making and execution (Ansell et al., 2017). In this sense, resilient railway infrastructure is simultaneously a matter of security, administration, sustainability and quality of governance.

The chapter therefore argues for a transition from a reactive to a preventive culture. Investment in infrastructure must be accompanied by institutional learning, planning, monitoring of vulnerabilities and the integration of resilience into routine decision-making, so that responses to crises do not depend exclusively on improvised measures.

CHAPTER II. THE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMANIA'S RAILWAYS. POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DETERMINANTS

The second chapter traces the development of Romania's railways between 1869 and 2022 and examines the relationship between the evolution of the infrastructure and the political-institutional context. The dependent variable is the development of the railway sector, measured through four indicators: network length, number of passengers, volume of freight carried and number of employees. These indicators are related to regime changes, military and economic crises, state policies and institutional transformations. The analysis shows that railway infrastructure did not follow a linear trajectory, but one marked by expansion, consolidation, destruction, a peak, decline and attempts at revitalisation.

Between 1869 and 1914, the railway was an instrument of modern state-building. Network expansion responded to economic needs, but also to the objectives of territorial integration, administrative centralisation and the assertion of sovereignty. This development is consistent with Tilly's perspective on state consolidation and with Mann's concept of infrastructural power (Tilly, 1995; Mann, 1984). The first routes, concessions and connections to external markets were shaped by alliances, geopolitical constraints and power relations, not solely by economic calculations. Historical literature on Romania likewise confirms the role of railways in modernisation and development before the First World War (Turnock, 2001).

The two world wars altered the function of the network. The infrastructure was militarised, used primarily to transport troops and resources, and exposed to destruction, overuse and reduced civilian investment. In the inter-war period, the priority became the integration and standardisation of networks inherited from provinces with different administrative traditions. The railway thus functioned as an instrument for consolidating Greater Romania, but it was constrained by economic difficulties and political instability.

The analysis confirms that railway development was linked to the political project of each period. The network served modernisation, territorial control and state security, while its performance depended on institutional capacity to translate political objectives into investment and administrative continuity. In this logic, infrastructure becomes a 'political artefact', reflecting both the ambitions and the limitations of the Romanian state.

Placing railway development within wider European economic transformations also highlights the influence of modernisation models adopted by peripheral and semi-peripheral states (Berend, 2016). For Romania, the choice of railway infrastructure meant both external connectivity and internal consolidation, which explains why decisions concerning the railway consistently carried a strong political charge.

After the Second World War, the communist regime integrated the railway into the logic of the planned economy. Industrialisation, large-scale transport of raw materials and goods, electrification, track doubling and capacity expansion transformed the railway sector into a pillar of the economy. During this period, several indicators reached historical peaks, including approximately 481 million passengers in 1989. The number of employees rose in keeping with a resource- and labour-intensive model. The thesis nevertheless underlines that quantitative expansion coexisted with institutional rigidities and with the subordination of

economic criteria to political objectives.

The post-communist transition produced the most significant structural rupture. Deindustrialisation, liberalisation, competition from road transport, reduced funding and the restructuring of SNCFR lowered passenger and freight traffic, reduced staffing and intensified infrastructure deterioration. The post-socialist transformation entailed a reconfiguration of the relationship between the state, the market and property, with lasting institutional effects (Stark & Bruszt, 2001). In the railway sector, this change was not accompanied by a coherent strategy capable of preserving the system's role in mobility and logistics.

Following Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007, the sector entered a multi-level governance regime characterised by common standards, conditionalities, European funding and integration into transnational networks (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). Modernisation focused particularly on European corridors, while a significant part of the secondary network remained underfunded. Europeanisation produced regulatory convergence and targeted investment, but not a systemic revival of the sector as a whole.

The evolution of the four indicators confirms this reading. The network moved from expansion to stagnation and deterioration; passenger numbers and freight volumes reached peaks during the communist period and fell sharply after 1990; staffing followed a similar curve. The conclusion is that these variations reflect changes in economic models and political priorities. After 1990, fragmented decision-making and weakened state capacity affected the functionality of the infrastructure, confirming the importance of governance architecture for railway performance (Pierre & Peters, 2020).

The thesis does not attribute the decline to a single factor. It results from the interaction between economic change, underfunding, managerial instability, discontinuous public policies and competition from road transport. Revitalisation requires modernisation of both the main and secondary networks, digitisation, better passenger services, intermodal terminals and human-resources policies aimed at retaining technical expertise.

CHAPTER III. RAILWAY SECURITY, SAFETY AND RESILIENCE. CRITICAL APPROACHES AND OPERATIONALISATION

The third chapter analyses the relationship between security, safety and resilience and proposes treating them as distinct but interdependent dimensions of railway governance. Security is primarily concerned with deliberate threats such as sabotage, terrorism or cyber-attacks; safety concerns the prevention of unintentional incidents through technical standards, procedures and operational control; resilience expresses the system's capacity to absorb disruption, adapt and return to essential functioning. The distinction is important because infrastructure protection cannot be reduced to a single logic. The concept of security is itself broader than physical defence and entails the political definition of threats and of the objects deemed priorities (Baldwin, 1997).

Three critical schools of security are used comparatively for the political-science analysis of railway infrastructure. The Copenhagen School explains securitisation: an issue becomes a security matter when legitimate actors discursively frame it as an existential threat, potentially justifying extraordinary measures (Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995). The Paris School shifts the emphasis from discourse to professional practices, bureaucratic procedures and expert communities that produce security in everyday settings (Bigo, 2002). The Aberystwyth School introduces the emancipatory and human dimension, assessing security through its effects on individuals, communities, rights and social inclusion (Booth, 2007).

The chapter's methodology turns these perspectives into an applied analytical instrument. For the Copenhagen School, the analysis examines how railway vulnerabilities are declared threats and placed on the political agenda. For the Paris School, it examines institutions, expertise, standards, risk assessments and control mechanisms. For the Aberystwyth School, it assesses the social effects of policies, including accessibility, the protection of vulnerable groups and the relationship between surveillance and passenger rights. This operationalisation represents one of the thesis's central methodological contributions, as it adapts general security theories to a concrete infrastructure sector and enables discourse, institutions and societal impact to be compared within a common framework.

The operationalisation is then used to answer the second research question through an examination of European Union documents and Romanian legislation. The objective is not merely to describe the rules, but to identify the political logic they express: securitisation, technocratic risk management or the protection of the individual. Legislative analysis thus becomes an analysis of railway-security governance and of the way European models are institutionally transposed in Romania.

Applying the three perspectives shows that railway security is produced through different mechanisms that overlap in practice. From the Copenhagen School perspective, railway infrastructure is selectively securitised, especially in moments of crisis. Wars, sabotage, terrorism, cyber-attacks, emergencies or geopolitical vulnerabilities transform the railway from a technical issue into a strategic object. In such contexts, political discourse can legitimise the prioritisation of resources, tighter control and the adoption of exceptional measures. The thesis nevertheless observes that the securitisation of the Romanian railway

sector has been episodic: in periods of normality, the infrastructure has frequently returned to an administrative and technical sphere without the same political priority. This dynamic confirms the political character of threat definition (Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995).

The Paris School offers a complementary explanation. Security is produced not only through public statements, but through the daily activity of institutions, through standards, audits, expertise, surveillance systems, risk-assessment procedures and professional cooperation (Bigo, 2002). In Romania, the centralised period was characterised by a clear administrative hierarchy, whereas reorganisations after 1990 fragmented competences and weakened institutional continuity. From this perspective, vulnerability can arise not only from a lack of technology but also from overlapping responsibilities, managerial instability or insufficient coordination.

At the operational level, the thesis proposes mapping physical and digital vulnerabilities, integrating risk maps with information on energy, telecommunications and IT systems, conducting crisis simulations, adopting integrated risk management and strengthening cross-border cooperation. These instruments correspond to the Parisian logic of governance through expertise and administrative practice. However, an exclusively technocratic approach may create a transparency deficit and turn security into a domain reserved for experts. The research therefore warns that infrastructure protection must be balanced with public accountability and with assessment of the social effects of adopted measures.

This conclusion is relevant to contemporary governance, in which security depends on institutional networks and on the distribution of authority among public organisations, operators and European bodies. In a fragmented system, performance does not follow automatically from the existence of rules, but from the capacity for coordination and implementation (Pierre & Peters, 2020). The thesis therefore argues that professionalisation, clarity of responsibility and continuity of expertise are conditions of railway security rather than merely secondary administrative concerns. They directly influence actual preventive capacity.

The Aberystwyth School perspective completes the analysis by shifting the centre of gravity from the state and infrastructure towards the individual and the community. In this logic, security is insufficient if it physically protects the system while producing exclusion, unjustifiably restricting rights or ignoring service accessibility. Applied to the railway sector, this approach emphasises citizens' mobility, passenger protection, the safety of public spaces, access for people with disabilities and the effects of infrastructure deterioration on social cohesion. Human security thus becomes a criterion for evaluating the legitimacy of policies, rather than merely an additional dimension (Booth, 2007).

The thesis shows that many risks can be managed through social and preventive measures, not exclusively through technological control. Better lighting and cleanliness in stations, accessibility facilities, the prevention of harassment and violence, consultation with users and measurement of perceived safety can complement conventional protection tools. This perspective warns of the risk that surveillance, profiling or excessive securitisation may turn the passenger from a beneficiary of security into an object of control.

The analysis of European and Romanian legislation confirms the predominance of strategic and technocratic dimensions. Directive 2008/114/EC established the identification

and protection of European critical infrastructures, strengthening both the logic of securitisation and the administrative mechanisms for assessing vulnerabilities. Directive (EU) 2022/2557 marks a shift towards the resilience of critical entities and places emphasis on anticipation, risk assessment, continuity and response capacity. In the thesis's interpretation, these instruments construct a robust framework for protection and resilience, but the social and participatory dimension remains less developed.

The chapter concludes that the three schools should be used together. The Copenhagen School explains the political definition of threats, the Paris School describes the production of security through institutions and expertise, and the Aberystwyth School provides the normative criterion of effects on people. The integrated Security–Safety–Resilience model proposed by the research is intended precisely to avoid a one-sided approach. An effective railway policy must combine protection against deliberate threats, accident prevention, the capacity to adapt and recover, and respect for users' rights and needs.

In the Romanian case, this framework reveals an asymmetry: the components of securitisation and technical administration are more visible in the rules than the emancipatory component. Strengthening railway security requires standards and technologies, but also participation, transparency and a user-centred orientation. Integrating the societal dimension makes it possible to evaluate infrastructure not only by whether it functions, but also by its accessibility, equity and capacity to sustain community mobility.

CHAPTER IV. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The general conclusions confirm the research's underlying hypothesis: the development, security and resilience of Romania's railway infrastructure are products of the relationship between the state, institutions and political decision-making. Developments between 1869 and 2022 show that the infrastructure functioned as an instrument of modernisation, territorial integration, military logistics, industrialisation and, subsequently, Europeanisation. Each regime used the railway in relation to its own objectives, while the system's performance depended on its capacity to translate political priorities into investment, rules and administrative continuity. From this perspective, historical trajectories matter because subsequent reforms are conditioned by inherited institutions and practices (Pierson, 2000; Todor, 2022).

Periods of accelerated development generally coincided with moments when infrastructure was treated as a strategic priority. The monarchy and the socialist regime demonstrated a high capacity for resource mobilisation and centralised coordination, although this model also involved costs and rigidities. After 1990, liberalisation, deindustrialisation, institutional fragmentation and the prevailing orientation towards road transport weakened the role of the railway. Accession to the European Union created regulatory and financial opportunities, but Europeanisation did not automatically produce performance, because the transfer of rules must be supported by administrative capacity and effective implementation (Börzel & Risse, 2010; Todor & Helepciuc, 2021).

Railway resilience is therefore interpreted as an outcome of governance. A resilient system requires institutional stability, predictable funding, skilled staff, coordination, anticipation and learning capacity. Vulnerabilities arise not only from disasters, conflicts or attacks, but also from internal choices: deferred maintenance, frequent managerial changes, fragmented responsibilities and the absence of a long-term strategy. In this sense, resilience becomes an indicator of the state's commitment to critical infrastructure.

The analysis of the three security schools leads to the same integrative conclusion. Romania has institutionalised the strategic and technocratic dimensions more strongly than the societal one. Railway security should therefore combine infrastructure protection, risk management and assessment of effects on passengers, employees and communities. Only this approach can connect operational efficiency with democratic accountability.

The thesis thus answers both research questions through a political-institutional explanation: railway development is influenced by the governance regime, while security and resilience are shaped by the stability and capacity of institutions. The railway emerges as a barometer of state maturity and of its capacity to sustain coherent public policies.

The research recommendations begin from the need to treat the railway sector as a matter of strategic governance, not merely as a technical field. The thesis identifies a paradox of formal depoliticisation and informal politicisation: institutions are presented as technical, yet key decisions concerning investment, leadership and priorities remain strongly dependent on politics (Flinders & Buller, 2006). In this context, depoliticisation does not eliminate conflict but may shift it into less transparent areas (Hay, 2013). The recommendations include the professionalisation of leadership, managerial continuity, clearer responsibilities and reduced political interference in operational decisions.

A second direction concerns Europeanisation. The transposition of rules and access to funding must be accompanied by stronger administrative capacity so that modernisation does not remain fragmented. What is required is a multiannual strategy, predictable funding, integration of the main network with secondary lines, digitisation, ERTMS, intermodal terminals, policies to attract and train qualified staff, and stable risk-management mechanisms. Rebuilding public trust also requires transparency, accountability and coherent institutional communication.

The thesis makes several original contributions. It constructs an integrated Security–Safety–Resilience framework, comparatively applies the Copenhagen, Paris and Aberystwyth Schools to the railway sector, and proposes an original operationalisation of these perspectives through variables, indicators and analytical criteria. In addition, European and Romanian legislation is examined through the same framework, while railway development is reinterpreted as an indicator of state capacity and as a political artefact. Its relevance is both theoretical, through extending critical security studies to railway infrastructure, and practical, by providing a useful framework for public policy and administration.

The research also has important limitations. Historical data are sometimes incomplete, dispersed or difficult to compare; the literature on resilience as a political construct applied to the railway sector is limited; the proposed methodological model is exploratory; and analysis of the rules cannot fully capture the gap between regulation and actual implementation. The sources are heterogeneous, and causal relationships between political, economic, technological and institutional factors cannot be perfectly isolated. The specificity of the Romanian case limits direct generalisation. Nevertheless, these limitations open avenues for international comparison, more robust historical databases and research on the relationship between rules, institutions and practice. Overall, the thesis proposes a coherent political-science reading of a critical infrastructure that is essential to mobility, the economy and security.

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