

THE NORMATIVE STABILITY OF ANTI-GYPSYISM: POLITICAL AND LAY DISCOURSES IN SLOVAKIA

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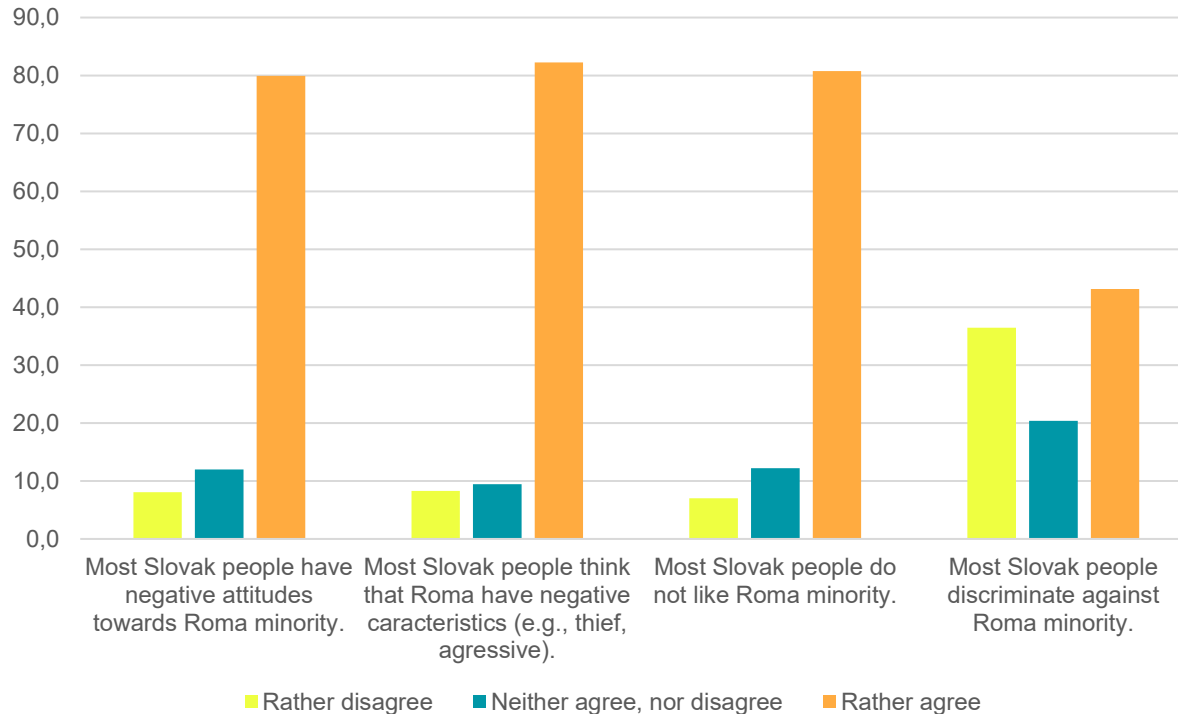
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Polrom, 2019
[www.polrom.eu]

- people in Slovakia are more sensitive to stereotypes and prejudice than to the discrimination of the Roma

ANTI-GYPSYISM: NORMATIVELY STABLE FORM OF RACISM

- anti-Gypsyism \neq individual prejudice
- Central and Eastern Europe: **normative climate** that makes discrimination of the Roma **morally acceptable** (Kende & Láštiová, 2024)
- **normative stability** – social norms underlying anti-Gypsyism are:
 - rigid and self-legitimizing
 - treated as grounded in experience, not bias
 - institutionally sustained and reproduced

Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

Impact Factor: 2.3 / 5-Year Impact Factor: 3.8

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The last acceptable prejudice in Europe? Anti-Gypsyism as the obstacle to Roma inclusion

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Abstract

National and European policies aim to facilitate the integration of Roma people into mainstream society. Yet, Europe's largest ethnic group continues to be severely discriminated. Although prejudice has been identified to be at the core of this failure, social psychological research on anti-Gypsyism remains scarce. We conducted a study in six countries using student and community samples ($N = 2,089$; Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Norway, Italy, Spain) to understand how anti-Gypsyism among majority-group members predicts unfavorable acculturation preferences toward Roma people. Openly negative stereotypes predicted acculturation preferences strongly across the countries. However, stereotypes about the Roma receiving undeserved benefits were also relevant to some degree in East-Central Europe, implying that intergroup relations are framed there as realistic conflict. Stereotypes about traditional Roma culture did not play a central role in acculturation preferences. Our findings highlighted that anti-Gypsyism may be an impediment to integration efforts, and efforts should be context-specific rather than pan-national.

ANTI-GYPSYISM: NORMATIVELY STABLE FORM OF RACISM

- not necessarily hostility, but **indifference** and **lack of solidarity** (Polrom 2018-21)
 - > discrimination is **not** contested
- **levels of norms** regulating perceptions of intergroup solidarity (Sweigart et al. 2024, Green et al., 2026):
 - **top down**: structural/institutional level, media/political discourse level,
 - **bottom up**: group level – proximal norms, individual level - RWA)
- **paternalistic** political discourse



2018, Draft bill about “Suppressing criminality of Roma settlements”

THREE STUDIES, ONE NORMATIVE CLIMATE

Study 1

[ENGAGE/APVV 23-0119]

Normative climate of anti-Gypsyism

2021-22

Theoretical analysis
+ interviews

Roma activism &
allyship

Study 2

[VEGA/APVV 23-0119]

Pandemic discourse

2020-21

Discourse analysis

Political legitimization of
discrimination

Study 3

[APVV 23-0119]

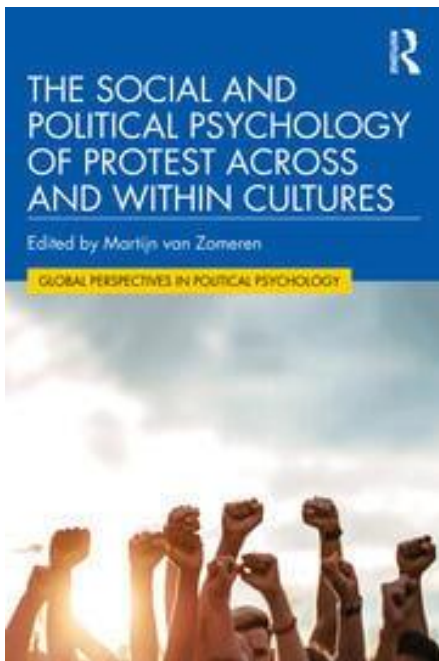
Lay discourse

2025-26

Vignette-based focus
groups

Lay normative reasoning
about intergroup solidarity
and discrimination

1. THE NORMATIVE CLIMATE OF ROMA ALLYSHIP & ACTIVISM



8

OPRE, ROMA!

Discrimination, misrecognition, and indifference as challenges for Roma activism and allyship

Barbara Lášticová, Judit Ignácz, and Anna Kende

Ame Panzh ("Five of Us" in Romani) is a Roma activist group of knowledge producers from Hungary established in 2020 by five Roma activists who felt an urgency to create a space where they could vocalize their perspectives and issues that had been silenced, overlooked, or inadequately addressed in mainstream media and intellectual dialogues. They tackle controversial topics such as racism among the "progressive" elite, educational segregation, and the superficial representation of Roma culture in society. Ame Panzh embodies intersectional resistance—challenging homophobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, and class-based discrimination. They strive to cast an uncomfortably honest light on the dominant power structures in the state, civil society, and activism. Their resistance is also constructive, creating a positive self-representation and group identity to counter racist, sexist, and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and practices (Ame Panzh, 2023).

Ame Panzh is a unique example of a new generation of Roma resistance in East-Central Europe! Notably, the second author of this chapter is a co-founder of this group. Their actions provide insights for the academic study of protest movements and activism, particularly understanding the evolving dynamics of resistance among marginalized communities, creating spaces to voice their concerns, redefine white narratives, and fight for their rights.

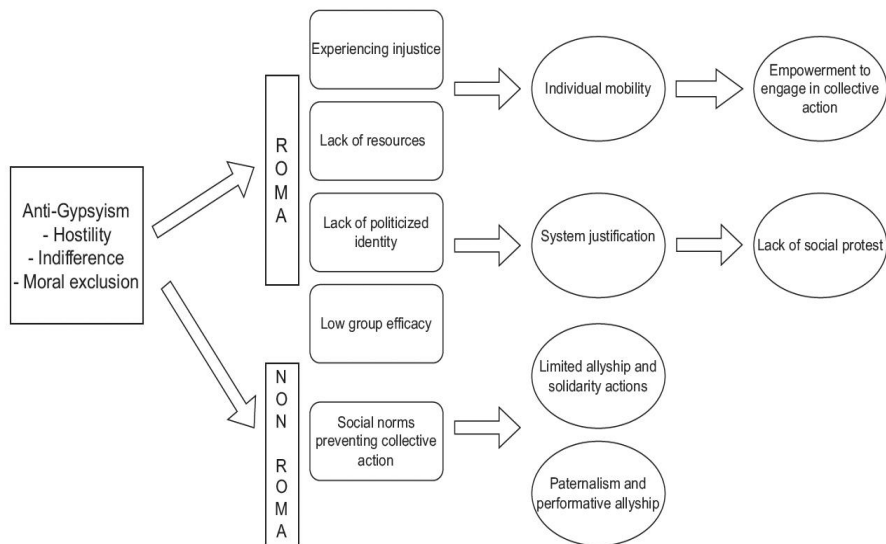
The example of Ame Panzh illustrates that social protest—a form of collective action "that seeks to bring about social or political change by influencing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of the public or the policies of an organization or institution" (Shuman et al., 2024, p. 253)—can manifest in various ways and does not always take the form a large-scale collective action. We contend that when structural barriers such as anti-Gypsyism,² restrict the possibilities for disadvantaged groups to engage in collective action, experience collective efficacy, and receive social support from the majority society, creative, minority-led initiatives become

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Three challenges for Roma and pro-Roma collective action and allyship:

1. Anti-Gypsyism and misrecognition of the Roma create obstacles to developing politicized & activist identities.
2. Roma face structural oppression and discrimination, leading to socio-economic deprivation, undermining Roma activism and protest due to a lack of resources & empowerment.
- 3.a Majority members are often prejudiced against the Roma, which creates a context of indifference or even moral exclusion, resulting in a lack of solidarity and allyship.
- 3.b Given the stable and large status differences, allyship is often manifested in "white savior" attitudes and paternalism.

1. THE NORMATIVE CLIMATE OF ROMA ALLYSHIP & ACTIVISM



“For example, keeping people in some sort of passive role as recipients of aid. (...) that's like we good white ‘Gadjos’ [non-Roma] have come to save you, and they feel like they're doing a terribly good job”

[FG, Donor organization representative, Slovakia].

FIGURE 8.1 Potential challenges for Roma and pro-Roma collective action in normative contexts of anti-Gypsyism.

2. INSTITUTIONAL RACISM DURING COVID-19

Context:

Spring 2020 – Slovak authorities impose militarized quarantine on Roma settlements (full scale lockdown, unparalleled in the “majority” villages)

Method:

- Discourse analysis of Slovak Press Agency texts (N=60)

Four interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987):

- **Control & surveillance** (legitimization via emotion of threat)
- **Epidemiology** (legitimization via rationality & expertise)
- **Military management** (legitimization via expertise & altruism)
- **Human rights** (criticism of ethnicization of the pandemic)

Slovak army deployed to quarantine Roma settlements



Slovak prime minister Igor Matovič (left) and MEP Peter Pollák announcing the move

“When those people [the Roma] will crawl around infected, we will all pay for it” (PM Matovic, 25.03.2020).

2. INSTITUTIONAL RACISM DURING COVID-19

Key findings:

- discriminatory measures framed as **rational, protective, and necessary** (discursive deracialization, Agostinos & Every, 2007)
 - denials of prejudice coexisted with essentializing constructions of Roma as sanitary threats
- institutional racism normalized through **permissive normative environment**
 - the pandemic measures were largely accepted by the Slovak public - 86,4% approved (ASMS, 2020)
 - this normative climate enabled discrimination at institutional level

Original Article

Topical Issue: The Elephant in the Room – Contributions of Psychology to the Study of Racism in Europe



Institutional Racism During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Legitimizing Strategies Used in Political Discourse for Quarantining Roma Settlements in Slovakia

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed existing inequalities in European societies, deepening the divide between advantaged and disadvantaged groups due to the disproportionate impact of both the pandemic and pandemic measures. For instance, Roma people were portrayed as sanitary threats, drawing on normatively accepted prejudiced beliefs. This paper focuses on institutional racism reflected in the full-scale militarized quarantine of Roma settlements in Slovakia in the spring of 2020. We examined how Slovak public authorities discursively constructed the Roma during the pandemic, legitimizing full control through quarantine. Using discourse analysis of data from the Slovak Press Agency (N = 50 texts), we identified four interpretative repertoires used by politicians to justify their decisions for settlements' lockdown: (1) control and surveillance, (2) human rights, (3) epidemiology, and (4) military operations. The findings highlight the entrenched nature of structural inequalities and the need for equitable policymaking to address systemic injustices exposed during the pandemic.

Keywords: Roma, COVID-19, anti-Gypsism, political discourse, Slovakia

3. LAY NORMATIVE REASONING: INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY & DISCRIMINATION IN FOCUS GROUPS

- **Sample:**

- N = 60, 8 FGs across Slovak regions (winter 2025),
- authoritarians **vs.** non-authoritarians (CRV, Stenner 2009)

- **Method:** Vignette-based FGs

- Hostility toward a Roma couple buying a house in the center of village (alternatives: Ukrainian couple, LGBTQ+ couple)

- **Analytical focus:**

- How do participants describe and justify hostility & discrimination?
- (How) do they perceive the lack intergroup solidarity?
- What normative frameworks do they mobilize?
- Do norms differ across minority groups?



“Get out of here, quickly!”

(Nižná Myšľa, 2024)

3. LAY NORMATIVE REASONING: INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY & DISCRIMINATION IN FOCUS GROUPS

“Well, for example, I’d be interested in what the house looks like – whether it’s, like, a nicer house, whether it’s been renovated, whether it’s nicely furnished [...] or whether it’s a run-down place. That in itself already says quite a lot about **those people** – what kind of house they’re buying, how many children they’re coming with, how large the family is, or whether it’s just the married couple on their own. Um, people say that Slovakia is small, and maybe that whole area is even smaller, so they **surely must have known them from before**; they must have known whether, by any chance, as this gentleman said [referring to another participant], they had come from some other village **where there had been problems with them**. Because I think that **people generally don’t have a problem with Roma as such** – as long as, uh, they behave well in society and don’t cause any trouble, then, uh, I think the majority accepts them too.”

(Silvia, authoritarians, Bratislava, December 2025)

3. LAY NORMATIVE REASONING: INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN FOCUS GROUPS

Ideological Dilemma (Billig et al., 1998): Fairness vs. Moral exclusion:

- participants often held **competing normative commitments** simultaneously
- “everyone deserves a fair chance” **BUT** “Roma don't use their chances”
- “we should help people” **BUT** “not if they don't want to help themselves”
- “discrimination is wrong” **BUT** “this isn't really discrimination, it's just reality”
- **Dilemmatic structure** allows exclusion to be maintained while preserving a self-image of fairness
- **Conditionality of solidarity** — fairness norms apply **in principle** but are suspended **in practice**

3. LAY NORMATIVE REASONING: INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN FOCUS GROUPS

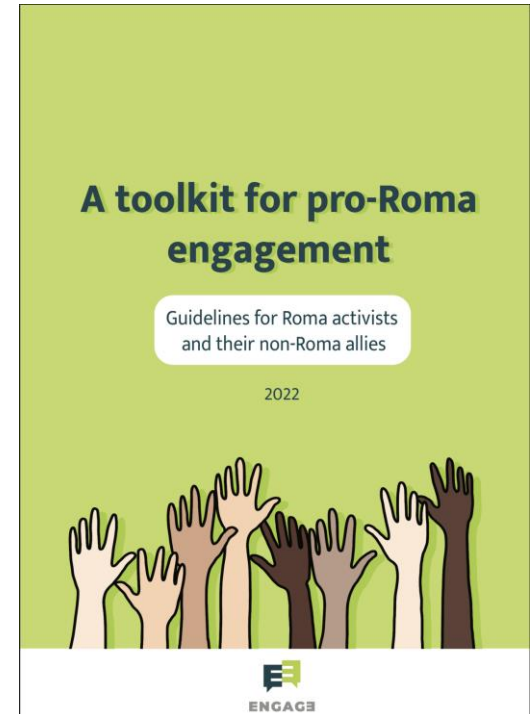
- Participants high in authoritarianism (CRV, Stenner, 2009; Pérez & Hetherington, 2014)
 - appealed to the universal norm of fairness but justified exclusion through implicit local norms and own experience
 - invoked deservingness as moral framework
 - anti-Roma hostility as common sense, not prejudice
- Participants low in authoritarianism:
 - more likely to express discomfort with hostility and invoke universalist norms of fairness
 - highlighted responsibility of institutions to signal norms of fairness
 - but some fell back on conditionality framing (e.g., negative experience with the Roma justifies discrimination)

3. LAY NORMATIVE REASONING: INTERGROUP SOLIDARITY & DISCRIMINATION

	Roma	Ukrainian Refugees	LGBTQ+
Norm description	Static, "always been this way" (realistic threat)	Dynamic, context-dependent (realistic threat)	Dynamic, contested in political discourse (symbolic threat)
Normative sources mobilized	descriptive country & local norms, own experience	descriptive country norms, own experience	political discourse, own experience
Justification of discrimination	"Understandable problem" (negative contact)	Humanitarian framing vs. relative deprivation (positive contact)	sympathy vs. rights/values (positive contact)
Discrimination acknowledged?	Rarely	Sometimes	When LGBTQ+ framed as individuals, not as a group

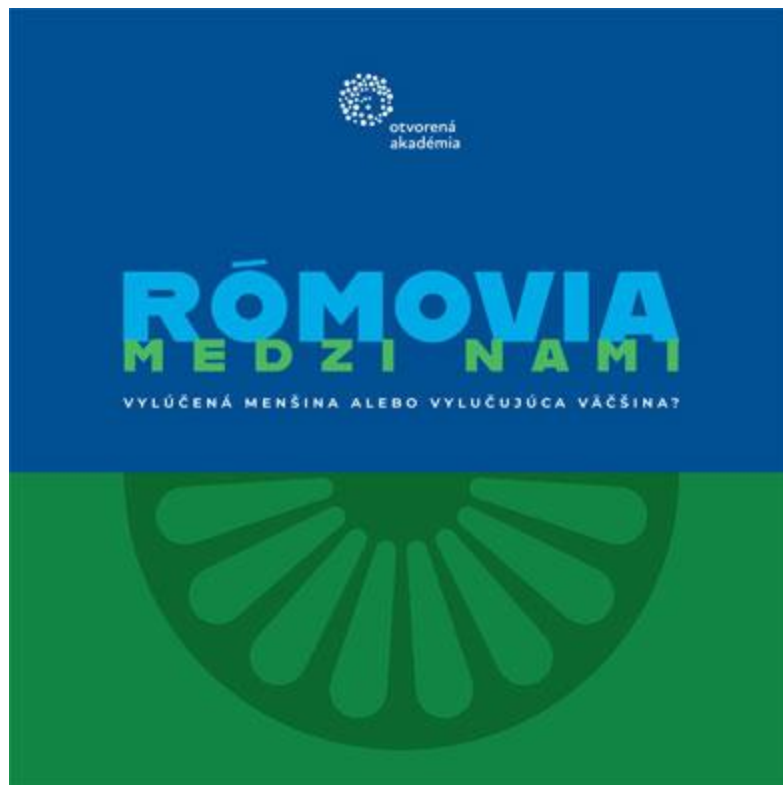
- Anti-Gypsyism (not only in Slovakia) operates within a uniquely **stable normative framework**
 - It is legitimized and reproduced through everyday reasoning, political discourse, and institutional practice
 - It is weakly responsive to counter-pressure (reactance)
 - **Confirmation bias**: normative challenges are absorbed and neutralized
- Social norms are perceived **as facts**
 - This makes them resistant to standard anti-discrimination interventions
- Qualitative methods are essential to understanding **how discrimination is legitimized**, not just how much it is endorsed
- Normative stability must be **actively challenged**

- **Target normative climates, not only attitudes**
 - Individual attitude change insufficient without normative shift
- **Counter-normative institutional signaling**
 - Institutions must clearly and consistently signal that discrimination is not acceptable
 - Silence = permission
- **Challenge deservingness frames**
 - Policy language should avoid conditionality that reinforces exclusion
- **Strengthen Roma collective agency**
 - Support conditions for Roma activism, visibility, and self-representation



www.polrom.eu/engage

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



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