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Electoral behaviour in the context of social
change: a generational model of analysis. Case
study: parliamentary and presidential elections in
Romania in post-communism

PhD thesis summary

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The transition from communism to capitalism was a long process in Romania that felt differently depending on several elements, extrinsic or intrinsic to the individual. From a political perspective, immediately after 1990, many parties have emerged, which, as can be seen during the study, have disappeared, either entirely or by their assimilation by other political parties. The impact of the transition to democracy on Romanians was high. After the fall of the Communist regime, many social norms have changed spontaneously. In the new architecture of society, the roles of individuals have been reconsidered and redefined. The Romanian Revolution of 1989 represents a key moment for understanding the transition and the way of reconfiguring Romanian society, a topic discussed in this paper.

The political parties in Romania are analysed only from the perspective of the electoral profile and less from the viewpoint of their evolutions. However, it is not possible to talk about this electoral profile in the absence of a presentation of the evolution of parties in Romania after 1990 and of observing how the alternation in power has shaped this profile. The study of the electoral behaviour of Romanians under democratic regimes following the fall of communism, which took shape at the end of a long economic and social transition, starts from shaping the voter's profile in the context of social changes.

Many factors surrounding the vote can be perceived as influencing the outcome of the election. The study of electoral behaviour in Romania started from the identification of the electoral profile of each party and the shaping of the voter from the perspective of socio-demographic indicators in the context of social change after the fall of communism. The paper starts from the assumption that the identification of socio-demographic indicators that influence electoral behaviour can lead to the outlining of a general profile of the Romanian voter for each election considered. Identifying a profile of the voters of the main parties and presidential candidates over 20 years, in all parliamentary and presidential elections, allows the observation of patterns of voting behaviour, still insufficient to outline a general profile of the Romanian voter taking into consideration only socio-demographic indicators such as occupation, education or gender.

The case study consists of all presidential and parliamentary elections that took place between 2000 and 2020, starting from the data of exit polls, and this was possible thanks to the research institutes Center for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS), the Avangarde Socio-Behavioral Studies Group and the Sociological

Research and Branding Company (CCSB), thanks to which I had access to databases. The exit polls used were from the parliamentary elections and the first round of the 2000 presidential election, the 2004 parliamentary and presidential elections, the 2008 parliamentary elections, the 2009 presidential election, the 2012 parliamentary elections, the second round of the 2014 presidential elections, the 2016 parliamentary elections, the 2019 presidential and European elections and the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Since the study of political behaviour is based on exit poll data, it has the advantage of following the analysis of the vote of an effective political behaviour and not a hypothetical one: turnout and voting option, in a similar context: election day.

Drawing up the electoral profile of voters of the main parties, as well as that of presidential candidates, along with the analysis of vote distribution by various categories, such as education, occupation or gender, in all presidential and parliamentary elections held between 2000 and 2020, allow for the monitoring of the evolution of each party that has managed to survive several electoral cycles in office.

The research on the electoral behaviour, otherwise inexhaustible, determined a complementary direction of the paper. The study consists of two parts, the structure emerging from research regarding the electoral process to quantify those social changes that have occurred in recent decades in close connection with the election periods. Assessing social change is a difficult process. Its impact on a heterogenous public having lived and been shaped within a different historical, political and social context is even more difficult.

The paper is structured in five chapters. The first three chapters refer to the main theories on voting and social change that took place in Romanian society after the fall of communism, from the transition to a democratic regime and to capitalism, including political and economic developments taking place in Romania after 1990, with implications on its electoral behaviour.

The first chapter contains the main approaches and theoretical models that explain electoral behaviour. The second chapter includes a synthesis of the socio-demographic and economic situation of Romania after 1990, from the demographic structure to macroeconomic indicators. Through an analysis of demographic and economic indicators over the three decades, I followed their evolution in the social and political context in which they occurred, including changes in population structure.

Thus, economic indicators such as the inflation rate, the dollar-leu and euro-leu exchange rate, the Gross Domestic Product, the evolution of the minimum and net average wage, the pension point are monitored over the last decades to outline all the economic changes that have taken place after the fall of communism. A few elements can contribute to a better understanding of the economic context in correlation with other social changes that occurred in society after the change of a totalitarian regime and the road to a democratic one, with its implications on changing the type of economy in society.

The second chapter also presents indicators on the demographic structure of the population, such as the evolution of the birth rate, mortality, number of marriages, changes in the environment of residence (urban / rural), but also the mortality rate by age, issues that are of interest for a better understanding of generations.

Chapter 3 presents a brief analysis of Romanian political realities from the first elections after 1990 to the social protests of the last decade. Unlike countries where bipartisanship has led to an in-depth knowledge of the doctrines and views on governance of major parties, in Romania the evolution of parties and the permanent changes that have occurred - the high number of parties, the emergence of new parties in each electoral cycle - did not allow the creation of a political identity and ensure the continuity of the policies assumed by the parties.

Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the research part, and each of them can be analyzed independently. The research focused on the secondary analysis of exit-poll data from most presidential and parliamentary elections in Romania that took place between 2000 and 2020. Chapter 4 brings forth the electoral profile of each election type – the profile of parties for parliamentary elections and that of presidential candidates, according to their occupation, gender, education –, as well as the analysis of distribution of votes belonging to the same socio-professional categories. The main dimensions of the political behaviour at the core of this piece of research are turnout and the voting option, taking into consideration socio-demographic variables: education, occupation, gender, and, subsequently, generation.

I have deemed information corroboration insufficient for the comprehension of electoral behaviour, given that social or political events have not taken a similar toll on the entire population. As a result in Chapter 5 I put forth a new research method: *a generational analysis of electoral behaviour* in order to study political behaviour in Romania from the first to the last cast ballot.

Identifying generations was a defining element in the present study on electoral behaviour. For this purpose, I divided the Romanian population into generations: Millennial or Y Generation, X Generation, Baby Boomers, Silent Generation and Z Generation. Generations were delimited starting from the classification proposed by Pew Research Center and I dwelt on the subject at length from the perspective of Romanian society. Although I have kept the internationally accepted names, I have noticed that only some generations, especially younger ones, are more similar to those in other countries. Thus, local generations are outlined in the paper, as a share in the total population and in the total number of voters.

The concept of generation used here refers to all individuals born in a given period, who have lived macro social experiences, such as the type of political regime, education, values, type of economy, the role of work, access to information or similar freedom of expression and and who have acquired common characteristics, due to these experiences.

The generation integrates the characteristics of society and the time in which its members live. When a generation changes and its sociological characteristics are different, voting behaviour must be understood in relation to these traits.

Understanding the economic and demographic context during the electoral elections, I considered them useful for studying the political behaviour of generations and identifying a profile of the Romanian voter. The process was equally an opportunity to distinguish local generations and identify the approach of certain generations, as well as of behavioral patterns which define their existence in general and their political involvement specifically.

Using the secondary analysis on the exit-poll data from the presidential and parliamentary elections from 2000-2020, I recoded the age variable according to the generation of affiliation. Thus, I studied the voting behaviour of four generations who voted in their entirety (Silent, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennial Generation) in the period 2000-2016 and five generations in the period 2000-2020, as Generation Z acquired the right to vote starting with the 2016 parliamentary elections.

I considered that the division of Romania's population into generations according to the year of birth and the determination of the size of each generation in the total population and in the total number of voters, departing from statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics of Romania, can be the basis of a

analysis of each generation's vote evolution. In conjunction with the turnout for each generation, as evidenced by the exit-poll data, I looked at the impact of each generation on the voting outcome in the last 20 years. I thus identified the turnout of each generation, in relation to share of the total voters and the share of the total population, and their chosen candidate or party. Subsequently, I identified a profile of the Romanian voter according to generation and other sociodemographic indicators, which can lead to a better understanding of electoral behaviour in Romania.

Table 1 regarding the age ranges for each generation in the presidential and parliamentary elections between 2000 and 2020, reported in the year of each election

Generation	Born between		2000		2004		2008		2009		2012		2014		2016		2019		2020	
	from	to	Vârsta între (ani)																	
Millennial	1981	1996	19	4	23	8	27	12	28	13	31	16	33	18	35	20	38	23	39	24
X	1965	1980	35	20	39	24	43	28	44	29	47	32	49	34	51	36	54	39	55	40
Baby Boomer	1946	1964	54	36	58	40	62	44	63	45	66	48	68	50	70	52	73	55	74	56
Silent	1928	1945	72	55	76	59	80	63	81	64	84	67	86	69	88	71	91	74	92	75
Z	1997	2012	3	-	7	-	11	-	12	-	15	0	17	2	19	4	22	7	23	8

Identifying these generations allows for the following observation: four generations have reached the adult age, while Generation Z has only partially acquired the right to vote.

The analysis of voting behavior in the post-communist period shows both that citizens have adapted to electoral offers and that politicians have led Romania along the path of democracy. The political class was heavily criticized during this period for its selection of members that disregards principles of meritocracy, but as has been seen in recent history, a technocratic government does not necessarily deliver as expected. The detailed analysis of the electoral profiles of the current parties reveals that citizens have often not found themselves in the governing programs of the of major parties, which has allowed the permanent emergence of small parties, but very few have managed to survive many electoral cycles.

The generational analysis on the voting behaviour in Romania shows that there are particularities of each generation that are manifested in the electoral behaviour. There is also a pattern of electoral behaviour, both for voting and for voting intention. The proposed model allows the identification of a party's electoral pool. However, it does not explain why voters exhibit such behaviour, but it is a first step in the complex process of understanding electoral behaviour in Romania.

Following the application of this model to two types of elections that took place in the same year, in a similar presence, the votes' direction and voters' orientation can be observed according to generation, education or occupation at the same time. This allows parties to know their voters and understand their expectations. At the same time, it opens new ways of research for understanding the electoral behaviour in Romania. Continuing research on the subject using qualitative methods can allow understanding the motivation of voters for a certain type of behaviour.

Defining the generation people belong to in the study of voting allows a better understanding of the behavior of the citizen in his role as a political actor in the Spatio-temporal universe of his development, from birth and throughout the formative-educational process to the realities of the society in which he lives. People belonging to the same generation are connected to each other by common features having determined their existence: the political regime, right and freedoms they share, the economic situation and expected social values.

After an analysis of elections that have taken place in democratic Romania since 1990, it becomes apparent that the type of elections has influenced people's mobilization. Presidential elections remain by far the most important type of election, with turnout constantly high. Elections held between two general elections, such as local or European ones, act as a test for the ruling parties. This was apparent in the last elections.