

MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI NAȚIONALE ȘI CERCETĂRII ȘTIINȚIFICE

SNSPA

ȘCOALA NAȚIONALĂ DE STUDII POLITICE ȘI ADMINISTRATIVE

National University of Political Studies and Public Administration

Doctoral School

**Università degli studi di Padova – Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sociologia,
Pedagogia e Psicologia Applicata**

**Democracy under pressure addressed through a historical institutionalist approach of the
technological revolution.**

Designing a normative proposal to save party democracy in a knowledge-based pluralism.

Resume of the PhD Thesis

PhD Coordonators:

Prof. Dr. Mihela MIROIU, National University of Political studies and Public Administration,
Bucharest.

Prof. Marco ALMAGISTI, Università degli Studi di Padova

PhD candidate: Matteo Zanellato

Bucharest 2021

Introduction

The thesis entitled “Democracy under pressure addressed through a historical institutionalist approach of the technological revolution. Designing a normative proposal to save party democracy in a knowledge-based pluralism” starts from the analysis of nowadays Western political sphere and explains it through the impact of technology on the quality of democracy.

What are the political consequences of the ongoing technological revolution? One of the main effects of the ongoing technological revolution is that party democracy¹ is losing its centrality in political processes, deteriorating the quality of democracy. Political parties, for example, seem to abandon their role of proposing solutions and socialize the political community, focusing more on how to obtain power and trying to exploit new technologies for their purposes instead of adhering to the knowledge-based society and promoting awareness on the consequences of these transformations for humankind. Moreover, they neglect debates on necessary measures and their usefulness. After understanding this issue, citizens tend to trust – as several cases of electoral results reveal - in two types of political actors that refuse party democracy, namely technocracies and neopopulism². The lack of education/expertise leads to populism, as politicians advance unrealistic proposals to win, deteriorating the responsiveness dimension. On the other side, without understanding technocracies as governments composed of experts, we face an un-pluralist élite that believes the only feasible solutions are the technical ones.

If we want to understand nowadays political phenomena, we must focus on the two main challenges to democracy in the 21st century, both of them rooted in technological progress:

¹ By party democracy I mean two fundamental characteristics of liberal democracies: a proceduralist conception of political legitimacy and the political mediation of societal division by political parties (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti, 2017)

² With *Neopopulism* I refer to populism born in democratic contexts (Graziano, 2018, p. 8) as it separates the populisms of the past (Miroiu, 2012, p. 324) from those of today. Given their ideological weakness, neopopulisms can be either right-wing or left-wing (Miroiu, 2012, p. 324). According to Dani Filc (2010), Cass Mudde and Cristobar Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) and Paolo Roberto Graziano (2018) the categorization of neopopulisms must not be done on the right and left axis but rather based on their concept of people concerning these three dimensions: material, political and symbolic. The material dimension concerns the distribution of public policies, inclusionary neopopulists will want to broaden the basis of social policies also to immigrants, while exclusionary neopopulists will want to limit redistribution to the members of the nation people only. The political dimension concerns the right to vote and to participate, inclusionary neopopulists agree to widen the suffrage to immigrants while exclusionary neopopulists are against this solution. The last dimension concerns the symbolic one, or, better said, who represents the people and who represents the elite. In this case for the inclusionary neopopulists, the people are represented by the class people, while for the exclusionary neopopulists the people are represented by the nation people. This categorization does not compress the traditional left / right axis and allows the understanding not only of the emergence of the abovementioned parties but also the transformations of the Romanian PSD and the Italian Lega Nord into exclusionary neopopulist parties, even if one belongs to the S&D Europeans and the other belongs to the Europe of Nations and Freedoms group, which is Eurosceptic and right-wing. Someone could say that the exclusionary neopopulists nowadays are called “sovereignists”, others could say that nationalists, neopopulists, and sovereignists are something different from one to other. In this thesis, I choose not to use this term because of a series of methodological problems that it could bring.

technological globalization that goes hand in hand with the economy and the new actors of Western democracies, namely neopopulisms and technocracies. Precisely because the main challenges to democracy derive from the technological progress both from the procedural point of view (ie with methods of communication, methods of act in political sphere) and from the substantial point of view of liberal democracy, (as the technological progress without a specific regulation can lead to the creation of inequalities in terms of equality) it is important to understand why technological changes also affect the environment.

Another relevant issue before continuing with my considerations is to provide a preliminary definition for technology: given the fact that everything around us is technological or uses the internet to work at full capacity, I can say that technology integrates in the environment in which we live and that we adapt to its rules to make it work better. But what are the technologies to which I refer? It is important to mention that I will not refer only to a specific technology, but I will rather start from the assumption that technology has roots in Western metaphysics and that to better understand the impact of the ongoing technological revolution, it must be seen as a *unicum* independently that we refer to all technologies that determine the technological revolution, to the digital revolution or to the knowledge-based society.

In this thesis, I will conceptualize the term technology following the example of Jacques Ellul (1964, p. XXV)³, more precisely I will use two words to distinguish between the various meanings that can be attributed to technology. As in common literature, by *technology* I understand hardware and by *technique*⁴ or *apparatus*, I understand both the rules and the experts that works in a proper system of connected technologies.

The structure of my thesis was designed following the causal mechanism that I will explain later. In the first chapter I detailed the methodology and the theoretical framework to analyze the impact of the technological revolution on the quality of democracy. In the second chapter, I analyzed the concept of technology, first through a philosophical perspective, then through an analysis of the consequences of the present technological revolution on the individual, on the community, on structures and on institutions. In chapter three I deepened the history of Italy and Romania trying to focus on the evolution of representative institutions and political parties between 1943-2019. I will focus on parties rather than on other intermediate bodies such as civic movements and lobbies basing on Powell (1982, p. 7) who states that «the system of political parties both constitutes an important

³ In another publication, the book review of “Capitalism without future” by Emanuele Severino (Zanellato, 2017), I used the same conceptualization that I will use in this thesis.

⁴ Given my continental influence, I will also use the word *téchne* to indicate technology as methodology.

link between the social, economic, and constitutional setting on the one hand and political performance patterns on the other». Finally, I proposed a draft of an electoral system for the knowledge based society.

Methodological outlines

Even though the Covid-19 crisis was a challenge for the last part of my doctoral thesis due to the difficulty of finding sources in Romanian as I was blocked in Italy, and at the same time I did not had the possibility to meet Romanian interviewees, I used a multidisciplinary approach that includes the philosophy of technology and political science, especially in terms of the historical institutionalist approach⁵ and I moved from theoretical approaches to empirical analysis - and vice versa. A limitation of this approach, however, could be considered the fact that I analyzed some purely theoretical passages, difficult to prove empirically.

The research techniques that I used were historical narrative and qualitative interviews. These allowed me to critically analyze the collected data.

Given that the historical analysis implies long period of time, I analyzed Italy and Romania from the end of the alliance with Hitler (1943 for Italy and 1944 for Romania) until the European elections in 2019. I chose these two countries because I chose the "most similar method" of comparison, ie these two countries differ in terms of intervening variables, but they have the same impact in terms of the independent variable.

The tools of my analysis are the dimensions of quality of democracy presented by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino, especially the dimensions:

- 1) interinstitutional accountability (Morlino, 2012, pp. 190-193; Schedler, Diamond, & Plattner, 1999, p. 17), the one that studies the relations between the various national institutions.
- 2) Responsiveness: the ability to meet the demands of citizens by governments, includes the ability to ask questions to the governments and the responsibility of politicians to promise feasible policies. During multilateral integration, this dimension is under increasing pressure.
- 3) Participation (Linssen, Scheepers, te Grotenhuis, & Schmeets, 2017, p. 288), the degree of participation of citizens in political processes, and I will focus especially on conventional participation, ie voting.

⁵ For a perspective on historical political science, see: Almagisti Marco (2016), Almagisti and Messina (2014), Almagisti, Baccetti and Graziano (2018) and Almagisti and Zanellato (2021).

- 4) Competition (Lijphart, 1968; 1999; Katz & Crotty, 2006, p. 436), the possibility of having different political values and different applicable policy options. An in-depth analysis of this dimension also means rebuilding competition in the political system and in the intra-party system.

Moreover, the map of Rokkan (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan, 1970) shows the conflicts present in the western European society and how the parties froze them until the sixties, and together with the changes and adaptations for the Eastern Europe (LeDuc, Niemi, & Norris, 2002, p. 205; Cabada, Hlousek, & Jurek, 2014, p. 93), this allowed me to analyze the political conflict in these two countries. Through qualitative interviews I tried to understand how the interviewees look at concepts such as technology and the technological revolution; to understand how the interviewees view the relationship between technological progress and the quality of democracy and to improve the understanding and the analysis of the impact of the technological revolution in the two countries.

I analyzed indicators such as the voter's turnout on the elections for the Chamber of Deputies, for the European Parliament and in the Presidential elections in Romania from 1946 in Italy, in 1946 and from 1990 in Romania; the election results of the abovementioned election; further, I analyzed the likes on facebook, twitter, instagram pages of politicians⁶, press⁷ and political parties⁸ collected at 22 May 2020.

Regarding the number of political parties, I calculated it using official sources as *Ministero dell'Interno* and *Autoritatea electorala permanenta* databases. Instead, I calculated the novelty index by assigning 0.5 points to parties that only changed their name and 1 point to new parties that appeared (for example USR in 2016), which merged, which split from another party and began to propose different policies.

I established a primary and three subsequent research questions, more precisely: **what is the impact of technology on the quality of democracy?** For the comparative analysis, I decided to limit the cases to two EU member states, therefore the subsequent research question was **how are the political systems of Italy and Romania structured?** Once I have approached the impact of

⁶ I analyzed the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram profiles of Giuseppe Conte, Matteo Renzi, Nicola Zingaretti, Silvio Berlusconi, Giorgia Meloni, Marcel Ciolacu, Traian Basescu, Liviu Dragnea, Calin Popescu Tariceanu, Klaus Iohannis, Victor Ponta, Dacian Ciolos and Raluca Turcan.

⁷ In this case through the press I understand newspapers or TV news, and I analyzed the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram profiles of Corriere della Sera, Repubblica, Il Sole 24 ore, Sky Tg 24, Tgcom, La 7, Rainews, Adevarul, Jurnalul, Gandul, Antena 3 and Digi 24.

⁸ I analyzed the Facebook, Twitter and Instagram profiles of Lega Nord (or Lega), Movimento 5 Stelle, Partito Democratico, Italia Viva, Fratelli d'Italia, Partidul Social Democrat, Partidul Libertate, Unitate și Solidaritate; Uniunea Salvatii Romania, Partidul National Liberal, Pro Romania.

technology on the quality of democracy in Italy and Romania, I will use a normative approach by responding to the other two subsequent questions **how can be pluralism ensured in the knowledge-based society?** and **how an electoral law should be designed, in order to ensure party democracy?** I established two research objectives, namely 1) To discover and understand the correlation between technological revolution and the quality of democracy in Italy and Romania and 2) To develop a normative proposal in order to guarantee party democracy in a knowledge-based pluralism. In the same way, I designed three secondary objectives, 1) In-depth theoretical study of technology and conceptualization of the term; 2) In-depth study of the changes of the quality of democracy in Italy and in Romania; 3) Comparative analysis on the political system of Italy and Romania.

In order to answer the research questions and to achieve the established objectives, I reformulated the model of Raniolo and Morlino aiming at understanding the impact of the economic crisis on a national political system (Morlino & Raniolo, 2017, p. 28). More precisely, I analyzed the impact of technology on the individual and on society, secondly I analyzed the impact of present generative processes, ie globalization and mass homologation (eg the purchase of the same goods everywhere in the world, disregarding the history of a country in favor of a certain type of progress), which of course also influences the choices that individuals make on a daily basis. Lastly, I deepened the history of political and representative institutions and organizations of Italy and Romania. This mixture of information leads to the causal mechanism, which I called *political action in the age of technology* and which will impact the dimensions of the quality of democracy. I could summarize stating that technological progress is an independent variable (and is structured through various actions), that history and political institutions of a country are considered intervening variables, and the result of the intersection of these data is the causal mechanism.

The central thesis of this research is that the technological progress amplifies and accelerates trends that are already present in a political system, having, however, a different impact on the dimensions of the quality of democracy based on historical-national characteristics. I will structure six working hypotheses that will respond to some changes in social accountability, participation, competition, responsiveness. Before answering these hypotheses, I will analyze the evolution of the political system of the two countries from a historical perspective. I believe that only after understanding the major changes in political systems I can test the hypotheses by underlying similarities and differences between the two political systems.

1) (participation) Decline in voters' turnout. The increase in technological means, the speed of information, their partiality, influence participation, reducing it. To verify the hypothesis, I will analyze the graph of the turnout in the two countries.

2) (competition) Decline in representation of the first two institutional parties; (competition, social accountability) reduction of trust in political parties, and radicalization of the political discourse. In what regards the first hypothesis, I believe that institutional parties that need periods of reflection and that have long term goals are penalized by political action in the age of technology. In what regards the second hypothesis, I believe that the decline of trust in institutional parties leads to a radicalization of the political debate and the consequent formation of radical parties. To verify the hypothesis, I will analyze the electoral results of the two countries, extrapolating the results of the first two parties, the first institutional parties, and the first anti-system and/or neopopulist parties (not making a difference between the two as it is not very relevant for the radicality of the message, aimed at finding the guilty and unwilling to offer solutions). I will analyze the trust in political parties and finally the relationship between parties, media leaders and social media.

3) (competition) Growing number of new political parties. By connecting to the abovementioned argument and the commercialization of the political discourse in the age of technology, I expect an increase in the number of political parties participating in electoral competitions, an exponential increase in the on-demand offer of any type of service. To verify the hypothesis, I will analyze the election results and calculate the novelty index based on scientific publications on the subject.

4) (responsiveness) Reduction of trust in democracy, Parliament, and Government. I expect responsiveness to be one of the most deteriorated dimensions of the quality of democracy by the issues analyzed in this thesis, with the consequence that institutions that provide political representation are damaged. To test the hypothesis, I will analyze data on trust in institutions.

5) (competition) An increase in the number of technocrats members in Government. This hypothesis refers to the decrease in the competition since the increase of non-partisan technocrat members in Governments means that the solutions can only be in line with what is required by the institutions created by capitalist technology and rules. To answer this hypothesis, I first periodized the events of the two political systems analyzed and then I calculated the number of non-partisan technocratic members in the Italian and Romanian democratic Governments.

6) (competition) Dismantling of old cleavages and the emergence of new ones. In this last hypothesis, I analyzed the systemic changes of political parties, trying to understand how much the Rokkan map has changed compared to its original version.

Concepts of technology and analysis of the technological revolution.

It is important to understand what meaning we could give to the term technology. This conceptualization is based on a presentation made by Feenberg (2003). Four meanings can be attributed to the concept of technology, dividing the results into neutral or autonomous and has values⁹ or human controlled.

I would clarify that the meaning "autonomous" means that not always the result of research is what experts tried to discover, an example is the atomic bomb, a result of the research for a more sustainable energy.

In the first group there are Marxists or determinists, ie technology develops autonomously, but economic and social institutions can determine the goals¹⁰. In the second group there are essentialists, as Heidegger (1954) and Severino (1993, 2002). They think that technology develops autonomously, and that society creates institutions to guarantee a more efficient operation of the technological apparatus. In the third group there are critical theorists¹¹, who believe that technology develops autonomously, but that society can set goals for social development. The last group is that of the liberals who believe that technology is neutral, and the consequences depend on how people use it.

I stand between critical theory and essentialists, because I am convinced that without a restructuring of institutions and organizations the only activity we could aim for is to adapt political systems to the requirements of technological progress. Furthermore, through the liberal idea I should have focused on a certain technology, which I tried to avoid. Speaking of technology as an independent variable, I want to refer to the set of technologies at a certain point in history.

Moreover, I explained the transition of technology from a means to an end, and therefore that what we are experiencing is not just a technological revolution made of new objects, but the result of an intrinsic change of individuals, in other words of their role in the world.

⁹ With "technology has values" I refer to the fact that technology is not neutral, but it is created with a set of values which establish a certain sense of direction as operativity and efficiency. Moreover, according to this axiom, only a new technology could resolve problems created from a previous one.

¹⁰ For more information, see Bijker (2006, p. 683)

¹¹ For more information, for an overview see Berg Olsen, Pedersen, and Hendricks (2009, p. 190) or Darrow Schecter (2010). The authors cited in my thesis are Herbert Marcuse (1964), Max Horkheimer (1947), Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (1944), Jurgen Habermas (1962, 2014), Andrew Feenberg (2002, 2017) and Langdon Winner (1977).

I retraced the path of the Weberian disenchantment of the world, I started from the Greek conception of *téchne*, in order to arrive at the end of the eighties in which a series of phenomena align (the neoliberal institutional reforms, the end of the great narratives- liberalism, socialism etc., the advent of the internet), and make place for nowadays world- a nihilistic one. More precisely, the technique *as panaceum universalis* has become a great narrative concurrent to the others (i.e. capitalism, democracy), which use the technique to achieve their goals. Unlike other naratives, however, the technique does not have purposes that are mutually exclusive, therefore, as indicated by Hegel, Weber, Galimberti and Severino, among others, a characteristic of the technique is the neutralization of conflict, through the achievement of goals¹².

However, if technology rises from a simple means to an end, even the “rules of the game” will change. Referring to the tradition that begins with Macchiavelli and continues with Alexis de Tocqueville, I think the conflict is an essential feature of politics, but if the great current narrative aims at neutralizing the conflict, liberal democracy will change into something else. I believe that liberal democracy is a political system able to absorb the characteristics of other great narratives (as it was for solidarity and human rights with Christianity and distributive justice from socialism), so I am convinced that it will be able to adapt, even in the face of this challenge but not changing its basic characteristics.

Another important aspect is the distinction Heidegger made between provocative and productive technology. While provocative technology has a certain goal and a known purpose, productive technology refers to sources of extraction. These are more important for my research because this is not about the extraction of natural resources, but about big data or data management that can be seen as extraction of personal data which can be exploited by neopopulist actors for example. First, one gives access to its data for a specific purpose and second, these data may be used by third parties in totally different purposes (as Cambridge Analytica revealed). When technology is used to extract resources, there shouldn't be damages nor in the process on the environment, nor on individuals, either if they are workers or digital technologies users. This shows that technology needs a philosophical dimension, as it cannot be approached without having in mind human values. This is why the section dedicated to the philosophy of technology referred to technology as a whole rather than a specific technology. Because only philosophy can give the connection between technology and human values, or the consequences that technologies could have on social structure and the individual dimension of life.

¹² For a cohmprenshive synthesis, see Galimberti (1999).

Another important idea is the fact that technological development diminishes the political conflict as technology implies a perceived lifestyle level that distracts the attention from social problems like poverty, improvement of the quality of work, social stability, and, moreover, technology undermines the social capital once produced in local communities. Moreover, democracy's legitimacy is also undermined when elections are suspected to be frauded or manipulated by foreign actors that appeal to social media to manipulate the campaign.

If I am to better explain in what consists the impact of technology on democracy, I can further refer to the impact of technology on the other dimensions of democracy, like accountability and responsiveness. I think that technology has to be understood having into consideration the social context and the social relations in which it is used, and nowadays there is a tendency towards abstract consumerist individualism and I think that this inhibits shared interests and the social capital needed for participation in a democracy. The present tendency to customise everything, our patterns of information consumption, our devices that are also customised and targeted are part of a "broader picture" in which intermediate bodies and other political institutions are weakened because these tendencies favor political polarization. Technology will further influence democracy in the sense that artificial intelligence will automate public or political decisions.

Comparative study on the evolution of the political systems of Italy and Romania between 1943-2019¹³

The European direction was questioned by the war in 1939-1941 and Hitler seemed to win all the key battles despite the fact that the allies were more an obstacle than a support to the German army. Churchill had presented the war as an ideological one between the free world and Nazi totalitarianism, in which science and technology would also have played opposing roles (Cassels, 1996, p. 183).

Roosevelt's victory in the 1940 election and, above all, Pearl Harbor in 1941 led USA to intervene in the war, the alliance with the USSR was motivated by *realpolitik* rather than ideological reasons (Cassels, 1996, pp. 202-203), as the two powers accorded to divide Europe into spheres of influence. Once the outcome of the war became clear, the two powers started to structure the world according to the outcome of the international conflict. If for the USA collective security was the priority, the USSR vision of the post-war world was structured in terms of balance of power, however they reached

¹³ The main texts on which I based my historical analysis are, for Italy Silvio Lanaro (1992), Indro Montanelli e Mario Cervi (2006a, 2006b, 2006c), Marco Almagisti, Luca Lanzalaco e Luca Verzichelli (2014), Ilvo Diamanti, Fabio Bordignon e Luigi Ceccarini (2013,2018) and Emanuele Severino (2012, 2017). For Romania Mihaela Miroiu (1999) (2012), Vladimir Pasti (2006), Pasti, Miroiu, & Codiță (1997), Henry Carey (2004), and Keith Hitchins (2014).

an agreement on the formation of the UN (Cassels, 1996, p. 203). The initial US-USSR agreement was overturned by events, and despite the arrangement that free elections would be held in Allied-liberated countries, the USSR began to support communist parties in neighboring countries, and the US adopted the Kennan Doctrine. In addition, the American atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was a statement not only for the American force, but also a new meter of comparison between the powers (Oreskes & Krige, 2014). We have seen how the international system was configured, now I will analyze the formation of state institutions and political parties of the two countries.

As for the two countries I analyzed, I can say that from the beginning of my analysis Italy and Romania had an equal and opposite path: they left the alliance with Hitler between 1943 (Italy) and 1944 (Romania) thanks to contribution of their King, for two years they had coalition governments with the Communist Party inside, and however the decisions taken by the great powers constrained the future of the two countries: if free elections were held in Italy (1946 monarchy/republic referendum and 1948 political elections) in Romania the elections of 1946 were the first step towards Romania's transition to a communist regime.

The first years were a period of almost total adhesion to the two aimed systems for both countries, with the alignment of the main economic and diplomatic objectives to those of the two superpowers, as well as the adhesion to the main supranational institutions to which they belonged - both the USA and the USSR.

However, starting with the 1960s, both Italy and Romania tried to gain political autonomy from their main partners. For Italy in terms of foreign policy this meant the commitment to a further European integration; and in terms of domestic affairs the "phase two" of the Republic: in these years the DC formed governments with the PSI, and, over the Seventies the leader of the DC Aldo Moro tried to empower the PCI, which in turn proposed the historic compromise to stop the advance of the right on a global level¹⁴. In the same time, in Romania the PMR leaders replaced socialist internationalism with the *national communism*¹⁵ doctrine, which began in 1964 with the rejection of the Valev reform of the Comecon, and it was strengthened by the election of Nicolae Ceausescu as first secretary of PMR in 1965 and the promotion of protochronism¹⁶ and of the Romanian Getodacic roots of the Romanian people, therefore preceding the Latin culture of the people. The new source of legitimacy

¹⁴ PCI Secretary Enrico Berlinguer referred to General Augusto Pinochet's coup in Chile.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that Romanian National Communism was a completely different doctrine than the Eurocommunism proposed by Enrico Berlinguer in the mid-1970s.

¹⁶ A theory that supports how much Romania preceded Western forms and customs (Adam, 2018, p. 223).

for the PMR was patriotism and the revision of Romanian history (Carey, 2004, p. 36) which would culminate in the victory of leftist forces to promote people's democracy and social justice (Hitchins, 2014, p. 251).

Ceausescu's condemnation of Soviet intervention in Prague gave international credit to the Romanian regime, who succeeded in establishing economic and technological exchange relations with Western countries, especially with Germany and the United States (Varsori, 2015, p. 293). These relations with Western countries did not last long: the Ceausescu's visits to North Korea and China in 1971 and the implementation of economic policies focused more on satisfying the Romanian president's ego than necessity led Ceausescu to embark on a new phase of Stalinist policies mixed with the cult of personality typical of Asian communist regimes, isolating Romania both to West and East.

Despite the policies initiated by the CPSU new secretary Michail Gorbačëv, *glasnost* (transparency) and *perestroika* (reconstruction), the 1980s coincided with the slow and inexorable decline of the Soviet bloc that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. Romanian leaders who refused to listen to both internal dissidents and their international partners were first isolated and then they fell victims of the bloodiest revolution due to the fall of the communist regimes, which began with the riots in Timisoara and ended with the shooting of Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena on Christmas day of the same year. The Romanian transition was led by Ion Iliescu, a former Communist leader who created the *Frontul Salvării Naționale*, and he was the most important politician in Romania at least until 1996, the year of the first victory of the opposition.

Italy was not immune from these facts: starting from the 1980s the transformation of the Venetian society from a peasant to an industrial one consisting of small and medium-sized enterprises open to flexibility and innovation, the DC did not understand this transformation and the Liga Veneta began to grow interpreting these changes¹⁷. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the PCI became PdS. A few years later between 1992 and 1993, a new electoral law and a series of judicial investigations that will be called *Tangentopoli* have completely transformed the Italian political system, eliminating traditional political parties and gave the opportunity to rise to a series of *catch-all parties*.

For both Italy and Romania¹⁸, the years from 2004 to 2007 were years of transition as they experienced the first transition from one coalition to another and back¹⁹ and changed the role of

¹⁷ For more information, see Marco Almagisti (2016).

¹⁸ Romania adheres to the European Union in 2007.

¹⁹ In Italy, after the brief experience of the first center-right government in 1996, the center-left won and then lost in 2001 with the victory of Berlusconi. In Romania, after Iliescu's long experience from 1990 to 1996, Emil Costantinescu and CDR managed to win by allying with the FSN of Petre Roman, but lost in 2000 in front of PSD, even finishing third, after Vadim Tudor.

political parties and television in election campaigns. At the same time, the period from 2007 to 2019 was one of further transformation for both countries: the constraints of EU membership and the international financial system, as well as the growing influence of social media in the formation of ideas are the two greater factors that influence the political systems. Therefore, we can see the alignment of the political cleavages that freeze the conflict in the two countries. In the following section I will present the analysis of the six hypotheses.

Conclusions

The first hypothesis is confirmed, as I can show that there is a negative trend in both countries, and that the elections that are considered the most important (respectively the Chamber of Deputies for Italy and the presidential elections for Romania) are the ones that have a higher percent of voter turnout. Given the fact that it is considered a functional institution, the elections for the European Parliament have the lowest voter turnout.

From my point of view, the loss of the central role that traditional political parties played in political processes, together with the de-ideologisation of society, are the reasons why this result appears. The risk is that a very low turnout will favor neo-populist parties that will be able to use technology and *fast communication* better than institutional parties, radicalizing public discourse. In this context, it is important to emphasize that, if participation continues to decline, democracy could be in danger because this form of government cannot exist without active citizens.

I analyzed the party structure in the two countries. If for Italy it was easy to consider that anti-system or neo-populist parties were PCI and MSI until the end of the eighties, and after that, Lega nord and PRC from 1992 to 2013 and further M5S and Lega, for Romania it was harder considering how the PSD changed over time. My consideration starts from the fact that PSD proposed policies that could not be considered in favor of the European and international liberal system, even if it produced symbolic resources in favor of liberal democracy.

However, considering that it was the party that led the transition from the communist regime to democracy and that during the government of the *red quadrilateral* managed to limit the allies' actions in government, I considered it an institutional party until it started using a nationalist speech against the European Union. For this reason, I chose to consider the PSD as the neo-populist party only after Liviu Dragnea became party president. In the last national elections Italy and Romania had both as

their first party a neo-populist party²⁰. Regarding how much the media, parties and politicians are followed on social media, I did not make a comparison considering the difference in success of social networks in the two countries and also the fact that the number of citizens is very different²¹.

Hypothesis two regarding the decline of the two institutional political parties was partially confirmed because it also depends on the structure of the party system and the electoral laws. It is important to remember that the concept of antisystem changed over time, from the political parties that wanted to change democracy with another political system to parties that criticize democratic institutions at the risk of making it less credible.

Instead, the hypothesis regarding the reduction of trust in political parties and the radicalization of political discourse was confirmed because as we saw neo-populist or technocratic-led parties have more likes than traditional media and that traditional political parties have lost their centrality in political systems.

Hypothesis three regarding the number of political parties growth is confirmed. The results show that although the number of parties has not increased in quantitative terms, in times of economic, political or social crisis political instability can be observed by looking at how political parties change from one election to another, and I can say that it is an indicator of instability.

The graphs show that trust in democracy and democratic institutions decrease during periods of social, political or economic crisis (for example in Italy in 1992 - political crisis, 2010 - economic crisis; and in Romania in 2011 - economic crisis). However, my hypothesis is denied because the trend is growing in both countries. My consideration is that neo-populist parties favor the political integration of citizens who would otherwise have been excluded from the political system. Furthermore, critics of democracy are more critics of the establishment (political, financial or bureaucratic) rather than of the political system in itself.

I showed that during the first republic there were few technocratic ministers, but the trend started to increase at the end of the 80's, a period that coincides with the acceleration towards economic integration and the Euro currency. Italy had two *full technocratic governments*²², one in 1993 when the prime minister was Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (former governor of the Banca d'Italia) and in 2011

²⁰ In 2018 in Italy the M5S won the elections with 32.68% even if it couldn't create a government, while in 2016 in Romania the PSD won with 45.48%.

²¹ Romania has a third of the population of Italy.

²² In this thesis I consider a *Full technocratic Government* or technocracy when it has the remit to change the status quo and the Government is composed of majority technocrat members (McDonnell & Valbruzzi, 2014, p. 664), and only this type of government is considered as dangerous to liberal democracy. In fact, we can have specialists on the one side in political parties, and on the other side in think-tanks or as consultants and advisors.

when the prime minister was Mario Monti (former European commissioner and Bocconi university professor). Romania instead had only one *full technocratic government*, in 2015, led by Dacian Cioloș. Each government in Romania is composed by 10-15% of technocrats. Hypothesis 5 "increasing in the number of technocrats" is confirmed because only in recent years technocratic governments were formed in both countries.

Looking at the profile of technocrats elected to the government, Romania prefers former soldiers and diplomats; instead, Italy nominates several economists with a background in international institutions. At the level of interinstitutional accountability, I showed the institutional framework (constitution and electoral laws) in order to understand the interaction between state institutions. I have shown that the relationship between the Presidents of Romania and the Prime Minister is especially important after the election of the President of Romania: even though the Romanian Constitution clearly defines the role of the President of Romania as a "mediator", there were tensed situations between the Government, Parliament and the Presidency after the constitutional reform, if the President of Romania and the Prime Minister belonged to different parties. The most conflictive relations were promoted by Traian Băsescu (with Prime Minister Victor Ponta or with Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu). The judiciary is also used to affect the trust in political leaders.

In Italy, on the other hand, there have been few conflicts between political parties and the President of the Republic, but the Judiciary has intervened more in the political system, especially since 1992. As for the cleavages, from 1946 to 1992 Italy had three main cleavages (Centre/Periphery, Owner/Workers, Church/State) and these were mainly frozen by DC and PCI. These conflicts remained the predominant ones in the years between 1992-2013, even if the party system changed, in fact the political competition changed its structure, moving from political parties to coalitions. Only one cleavage remained frozen by Lega Nord, the Centre/Periphery one.

In Romania from 1989 to 2004 the most important cleavages were the Centre/periphery if we consider the role of the UDMR, and left conservatives/right conservatives if we consider the PSDR, CDR and PNL. From 2013 in Italy and from 2004 in Romania the cleavages started to be more and more similar. So, I confirmed hypothesis 6 "In terms of competition, there will be a transformation of political cleavages, which leads to the disappearance of the old one and the emergence of new ones", in fact in Italy and Romania the main cleavage is internal/external, or better explained who is in favor of the current technological globalization²³ vs who is against.

²³ On this subject see Luigi Di Gregorio (2019).

A difference is found in the interpreters of this cleavage, in Italy Lega Nord represents exclusionary neopopulism and is defined as a right-wing party, while in Romania the PSD led by Liviu Dreagnea is definable as an exclusionary neopopulist party even if it is characterized as a left-wing party. The parties that support technocratic solutions were born in both countries, even if in Romania they have more important results.

I think that the cleavage neopopulists vs. technocrats is not our concern, but a cleavage between pluralist parties vs. technocrats and neopopulist parties could be in years to come.

From the empirical analysis to a normative proposal.

Before presenting my proposal, I have analyzed the electoral laws with which Italy and Romania voted over time²⁴, Italians voted with a proportional law 89% of all the analyzed elections, even if the thresholds and the majority bonus changed; Romanians voted with a proportional law 83% of the elections.

Before presenting my solution to save pluralism without however creating an illiberal type of democracy, I would like to remind that we cannot fight neo-populism only through electoral laws (the French example should be idealtypical: the National Front continues to grow and affect political system despite the electoral system has always prevented the rise of far-right parties).

Even if social capital is produced in society, the problem is that political parties no longer represent social groups as they did in the period up to 1990 and political parties are no longer able to anchor it to political institutions.

Regarding the technological revolution, it is important to consider that compared to the 1920s, when the expansion of suffrage was accompanied by mass education projects, no measures are being taken today in favor of digital literacy.

The system I propose is the Alternative vote single-scrutiny majority system, where the voters cast their vote for all candidates and the vote is transformed into a seat in parliament through this mechanism: only those who gain 50% + 1 of the votes win the seat, except that, compared to the French system, through this system voters vote only one time and the votes are added up according to the ranking expressed by each voter.

I think this voting system solves some problems presented in my doctoral thesis triggered by the age of technology. First of all, there would be no false leadership pluralization as I verified that the leaders are stronger than the parties. Candidates have more responsibility, as do voters who have to rank all

²⁴ For more information, see Alan Siaroff (2019).

parties instead of voting for a single candidate. Candidates would be forced to propose policies in a thoughtful way, because their goal would not only be to win the votes of their supporters, but to avoid being placed last in the ballot box of those who would vote for other parties. In other words, the candidate should seek to offer public policies that could unite rather than divide (Lundell, 2010, p. 36), although the role of political parties in including experts in program design and in finding good candidates would remain important.

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