

From Partisanship to Abstention: Changing Types of Electoral Behavior in a New Democracy

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Abstract. Post-communist transitions to democracy in Central and Eastern Europe were generally accompanied by an increase of the share of citizens who do not vote. Absentees are usually persons who do not feel close to and do not identify themselves with any political party. The paper builds a typology of voters/non-voters and then examines the changing patterns of electoral behavior in Romania using statistical analysis based on survey data from 1990 to 2008. In the last 20 year of democratic reconstruction in Romania, we can notice a general decline of turnout in parliamentary elections and, in this context, a relative increase of the weight of pragmatic-individualist voters and a subsequent decrease of the relative share of party loyalists in the total share of voters. This raises questions about the credibility of the Romanian political parties and their ability to retain voters from one election round to another. Moreover, there are significant attitudinal and socio-demographic differences between partisan and non-partisan voters, on the one hand, and between voters and absentees, on the other hand. Finally, the paper reconsiders the conceptions and applicability of partisanship in the changing context of elections and voting behaviors in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: *electoral behavior, partisanship, migration, political sophistication, rural-urban divide, Romania*

Introduction

The quality and inclusiveness of democratic systems is often evaluated in terms of degree and forms of citizens' political involvement. Thus, political participation is considered a key indicator for evaluating the functioning of representative democracies (Norris, 2002; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Although electoral participation is not the only way citizens can make their voice

heard in the political sphere, voting in elections is perhaps the most important source of legitimacy in modern democratic governance (Johann, 2012; Tătar, 2011c). A high turnout in elections for a relatively long period is associated in most of the stable democracies with civism and identification with the democratic system. This interpretation has normatively prevailed in some democracies, so they have legally regulated the obligation to vote in elections (Kaase, 2007).

Despite theoretical and normative expectations of higher participation in democratizing societies, the post-communist context of Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by a widespread estrangement of citizens from politics and public sphere (Howard, 2003; Letki, 2003). The generalized participatory decline affects both electoral (Kostadinova, 2003; Kostadinova & Power, 2007; Kostelka, 2010; Rose & Munro, 2003) and non-electoral forms of citizens' political involvement in the region (Barnes & Simon, 1998, apud. Dalton & Klingemann, 2007). Romania remarkably portrays the declining regional trend of political engagement, as this country is one of the former communist block's states with the sharpest decreases in participation rates after 1989. Moreover, in terms of political attitudes, the Romanians have experienced increased political disaffection during the post-communist transition period (Tătar, 2011b). The most obvious symptoms of the political alienation of a significant part of the Romanian citizenry¹ include: a growing distrust of political institutions and politicians, political cynicisms², and a sense of personal inefficacy in politics (inability to influence decision-making). All these attitudes point to people's perception of a widening gap between political elites and citizens, which constitutes a negative premise for the subsequent engagement in the democratic political process.

This paper analyzes electoral behavior in post-communist Romania focusing especially on the nexus between party identification and the decision to vote or not. I differentiate between partisan voters (those that express closeness to a political party) and non-partisan or pragmatic (individualist) voters, and I compare the two categories with non-voters. Thus, the study will address the following research questions: What are the main trends of electoral participation and

¹ For instance, Tufiş (2010, p. 51) estimates that around one third of the Romanian adult population "(self)exiled" itself from the political sphere.

² Political cynicism is understood here as a negative sentiment towards the political process which is perceived to corrupt the persons who participate in it. Consequently, the cynics believe that political processes draw into politics only those persons who are corrupt or want to get rich by any means.

partisanship in post-communist Romania? How can these dynamics be explained? How has the emigration of the Romanian workers influenced turnout in parliamentary elections? What are the differences between voters and non-voters? Are partisan voters more politically sophisticated than pragmatic voters? The data used for answering these research questions come both from official statistics and reports and several national and international survey datasets from 1990 to 2009, representative for the adult population of Romania.

The paper is structured into six parts. First, I will critically review the literature on the nexus between electoral behavior and partisanship. Then I will briefly present the data and methods used for answering the research questions. In the following section I compare the dynamics of turnout in elections and the evolution of partisanship in Romania, after 1989. Afterwards, I construct a typology of the Romanian electorate based on voting behavior and partisanship. Next, I will examine the attitudinal and socio-demographic characteristics of different types of voters/non-voters. In the concluding section, I will summarize the main findings and discuss their theoretical implications.

The electoral behavior – partisanship nexus: An overview

The declining political engagement of Romanians during the post communist period was also accompanied by an increased party dealignment and electoral volatility from one round of elections to another (Tătar, 2011b). Previous research on Western democracies has emphasized that as alignments between parties and voters weaken, electoral volatility (that is switches from one party to another) increases (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). There are basically two perspectives on electoral volatility: a pessimistic one and a more optimistic one (Dassonneville, 2012). The negative interpretation is that volatile voters are less politically sophisticated, being thus uninformed and/or uninterested about politics (Berelson, 1963 apud. ; Dassonneville, 2012), as well as less knowledgeable and aware on how they can influence decision-making or why is politics relevant for their life (Cameron, 2009; Highton, 2009; Luskin, 1990; McClurg, 2006). On the contrary, other scholars claim that volatile voters are more politically sophisticated, as they are highly informed and interested in politics and are capable to make their own and meaningful choices during the elections, not relying solely on socio-demographical predispositions (Dassonneville, 2012) and partisan bounds. According to this positive view,

sophisticated voters switch parties because they are politically pragmatic, meaning they are capable of assessing and choosing among different party programs and electoral offers, those that best fit or represent their interest. This latter interpretation rests on the assumption that political sophistication enables citizens to connect their values and interests to their political opinions and behaviors and thus provides a variety of advantages for those who have this characteristic, compared to those that do not have it (Highton, 2009). Moreover, political sophistication or “expertise” in Luskin’s (1990) terms is linked to more political awareness and engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006).

On the other hand, the theoretical and normative relevance of analyzing the differences between types of voters and non-voters rests particularly in what Verba et al. (1995) call “participatory inequalities” which can undermine democracy if participation in politics is obstructed by structural constraints. Those who participate can make their voice heard in the political process and their interests are better represented in the political sphere, compared to those that do not/cannot participate. If the factors that hinder the political engagement of different segments of citizenry are based on unequal access to participatory resources, then the terms in which political participation processes take place in a democracy might not be fair (Teorell, 2006) inducing a “participatory bias” based on structural constraints. And this compromises the principle of political equality that underlies democracy (Dahl, 1989; Verba, et al., 1995).

Participation inequalities can be explained by a variety of individual characteristics that are in their turn unequally distributed in society. Above all, early electoral studies highlighted party identification (party ID) as one of the most reliable predictors of voting in elections. In 1960 the research group of the University of Michigan proposed the paradigm of the “captive” voter in a collective book entitled *The American Voter* (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), which became a classic of electoral studies. The authors identified strong and persistent attachments of citizens to one of the two major American political parties, which structure the American political life. The researchers pointed out that strong partisan identification of Americans influenced not only their voting behavior but also most of their political attitudes. Moreover, once acquired, party attachments were remarkably durable and have generated almost a mechanical reproduction of partisan preferences from one generation to another (Baudouin, 1999).

However, during the 1970s analyses began to show a systematic erosion of identifications with political parties. As a reaction to the Michigan group's paradigm, *The Changing American Voter* (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976) proposed a new model of the "individualist" voter freed from party mechanisms (Baudouin, 1999). Moreover, the authors of *The Changing American Voter* find growing party dealignments especially among the younger age cohorts, characterized by high electoral volatility from one round of election to another, and whose vote is based more on issues and persons and less on party identifications.

Although the concept of party identification can hardly be translated from the American context (with two major parties) to the European one (with more fragmented and sometimes more volatile multiparty party systems) (Campbell, et al., 1960; Holmberg, 2007; Thomassen & Rosema, 2009 apud. Dassonneville, 2012), empirical analyses have proved the usefulness of this concept in explaining turnout in elections (Comșa, Gheorghiță, & Tufiș, 2010; Tătar, 2011c; Teodorescu, 2009). However, the original claim of the Michigan school that party identification is an attitude acquired mainly through socialization during childhood and adolescence is less functional in the post-communist context. According to Tufiș (2010) there are several relevant aspects regarding the way attachments to political parties might crystallize/diminish in the Eastern European context. First, the almost instantaneous emergence of political parties in post-communist societies excludes the formation of attachments to them through political socialization, leaving only direct experience as a possible source of attachment to a political party. Thus attitudes towards parties are more volatile and vulnerable to critical evaluations of their current (mainly economical) performance as parties in government. Second, the initial post-communist transition period was characterized by an increased instability of the party systems and this did nothing but to delay the formation of strong attachments to political parties. Third, due to a high personalization of politics it is possible that closeness to a specific political party means in fact an attachment to the party leader. In this case, identification with a political party might easily vanish if the nexus between a particular party and its leader no longer exists. Research on partisanship in new democracies points out that "party identification is mainly shaped by political factors, not social variables" (Holmberg, 2007, p. 566). This means that in post-communist Eastern Europe, partisanship is more an evaluative and political concept, an endogenous notion emerging within the political processes.

Partisanship, understood as attachment to political parties, can be disentangled into three main aspects (C. D. Tuft, 2010): a general attachment meaning the closeness to a political party; the intensity of attachment taking into account the degree of identification with a political party (i.e. from low/weak to high/strong attachment); a specific attachment to a particular party allowing thus comparisons between partisans of different political parties. In this paper I will focus on the former aspect mentioned above, namely the general attachment/closeness to any political party. This research strategy is motivated first, by the focus of this paper not on partisanship *per se* but on its analysis in conjunction with electoral behavior, and second, by the necessity to have a more general concept/variable (i.e. *low intension, high extension*) suitable for the constructions of voter/non-voters typologies that allow diachronic comparisons using data from different surveys.

Voters, respectively non-voters can be classified according to several criteria: confidence in parties / political leaders, the degree of partisanship (identification / closeness to one party or another), voting intentions, etc. (Comşa, 2006). Depending on the consistency of participation in elections, one can distinguish between systematic voters (always vote), conjectural non-voters (sometimes vote, other times do not vote) and systematic non-voters (never or almost never vote). Comşa (2006) estimates the size of the conjectural non-voters category to be around 40% of the voting population of Romania, containing those who do not vote in certain elections. The percentage of those who say they never vote (systematic non-voters) is much lower, estimated by Comşa (2006) to about 8%.

A report commissioned by the European Parliament presents likewise results for 'unconditional' abstainers (those who never vote) in the 2009 European elections in Romania (European Parliament, 2012). Somewhat similar figures appear in a study conducted by the Institute for Public Policy in March 2009 (see Alexandru, Moraru, & Ercuş, 2009): 8% of respondents say they never vote in parliamentary elections, and 7% say they never vote in the presidential elections. Also 16% reported they rarely vote in presidential elections and 12% that rarely vote in parliamentary elections. Should be noted that these estimates are based on the respondents' statements in post-electoral surveys, and the real figures may be significantly higher.

Beyond the typologies outlined above, it remains to assess the factors that lead individuals to vote or abstain in elections. Literature devoted to participation reveals a number of perspectives from which citizen involvement in politics is analyzed. The institutionalist approach focuses on the structure of opportunities for participation

offered by institutional channels and procedures. At the macro level, comparative studies reveal significant differences between countries' institutional setup and degree of openness to citizen participation in public affairs. The institutional openness can inhibit or stimulate citizens involvement (Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986). But even within the same political and institutional system there are often significant differences between the degree of participation of the poor and the rich, between young and old, between those with higher education and those with primary school (Norris, 2002). This direction of analysis is used by the structural perspectives which emphasize the role of social cleavages based on age, gender, social status, which are closely related to resources such as time, money, knowledge and skills necessary to participate (Verba, et al., 1995). On the other hand, motivational perspectives focus on cultural attitudes and values that people have in the processes of political participation, including civic engagement norms, political interest, ideological and partisan identification, etc. Unlike the above perspectives, theories of mobilization highlight the role of agents, either taken individually, (such as political leaders), or collectively as the social networks and organizations such as political parties, trade unions, voluntary organizations and community associations that act as catalysts and mobilizers of participation (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). To summarize, the explanatory models mentioned in the literature suggests that individuals do not participate because they cannot, don't want to or simply because nobody asked them to participate (Norris, 2002).

Data and methods

The data used in this paper comes from official statistics and reports (concerning turnout in elections and emigration of Romanians) and survey datasets. The source of data used for analyses are mentioned below each table/figure. In this section, I will only briefly present the post-electoral surveys carried out in Romania and used in this article: for the elections of 20 May 1990, I used data collected from a representative sample of 1234 people in Romania in December 1990 within the international study *Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe in 1990-2001. Cumulated Survey Data* (Rotman et al, 2004); for the elections of 3 November 1996, I used data collected in Romania on a sample of 1175 respondents in December 1996 within the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES Module 1), 1996-2000; for the elections of November the 28th, 2004, I used the second module of the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES, Module 2), 2001-2006 conducted in

Romania in December 2004, on a representative sample of 1913 people; for the parliamentary elections of 30 November 2008, I used data from the *European Social Survey, Module 4, 3rd edition*, (ESS round 4) carried out in Romania between 2 December 2008 and 19 January 2009 on a representative sample of 2146 respondents.

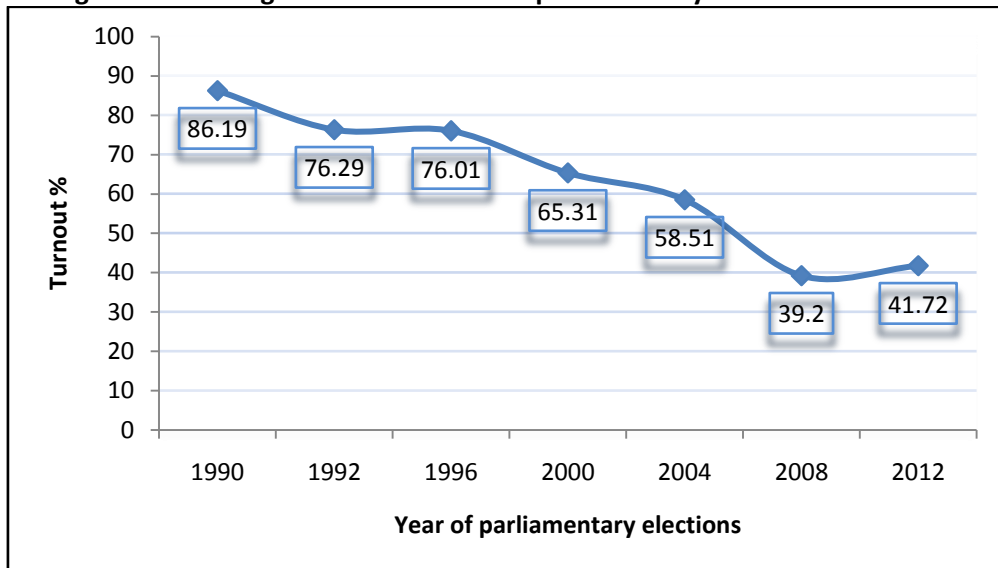
In this paper, I will use sample re-weighting as a method for correcting distortions in survey data starting from the assumption that voting in elections is perceived by individuals as a socially desirable behavior and thus there is a significant tendency of over-reporting voting in post-electoral surveys. The method consists of differential weighting of individuals in the sample according to their declared voting behavior (those who said they had voted, respectively had not voted in the last parliamentary elections) using official aggregated data on turnout as known values of the voting population, for each row of parliamentary elections in Romania from 1990 to 2008. This weighting scheme is based on the following idea underlined by Crow and Berumen (2007): a higher weight is given to respondents who admit that they had not voted (assuming they tell the truth) and a lower weight is assigned to those who claim to have voted (assuming that some of them tell the truth, but a significant portion of them falsely stating they had voted)³. In other words, weighting is a correction of the under-representation of the true non-voters in the sample used (Crow & Berumen, 2007). The methods of data analysis used in this study consist mainly of descriptive statistics, and bivariate statistical analysis.

Electoral participation and emigration: developments in post-communist Romania

In Romania turnout in parliamentary elections has decreased by over 50% in the last two decades. While in the first post-communist elections of 1990 over 86% of Romanians voted, turnout in the parliamentary elections of 2012 was 41.76%. There are multiple factors explaining the decline in voter turnout in parliamentary elections in Romania in the last 20 years (Tătar, 2011c). Two of the most prominent factors contributing to decreasing electoral participation are: people's disaffection with post-communist politics and the increasing mobility of the Romanian workers abroad. On the one hand, the recurrent disappointments of a significant part of the population with the post-communist governments reduced the feeling that elections can function as a mechanism to produce social transformation (Tătar, 2011c).

³ For a more thorough discussion of the weighting scheme please see Tătar (2011b, pp. 114-118, pp. 119-120; 2011c)

Figure 1: Declining turnout in Romanian parliamentary elections 1990-2012



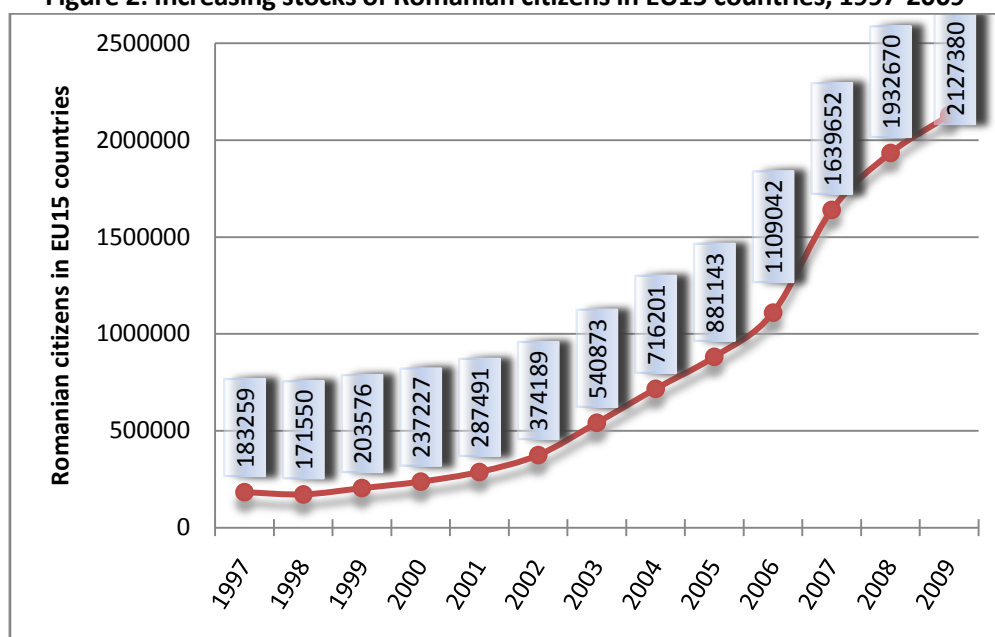
Source: own elaboration based on data available on the websites of the Central Electoral Commission for the Romanian parliamentary elections, from 1990 to 2012.

Another important factor explaining the sharp decline in electoral participation is the increasing stock of Romanians working abroad (see Figure 2). A report on labor mobility carried out on behalf of the European Commission estimates the number of Romanian citizens in the EU15 countries to be above 2 million persons, most of whom have worked in Italy, Spain and Germany in 2009 (Holland, Fic, Rincon-Aznar, Stokes, & Paluchowski, 2011). However, other studies, using both official data and public opinion surveys carried out in Romania and abroad, estimate the number of Romanians working and living abroad (not only in EU15) to be around 3 millions (Abraham & Șufaru, 2009). Citizens working abroad and having valid Romanian identity documents are automatically enrolled in the electoral lists containing the voting population of Romania. However, out of these 2-3 millions of Romanians working abroad, less than half a million (441,769) had permanent residence in their host country and consequently the right to vote abroad for the Romanian parliamentary elections of 2012, according to Mircea Dușa, Minister of Administration and Interior, cited by the Romanian press⁴. If these figures are correct, then it means that only between 16 and 25% (depending

⁴ See <http://www.ziare.com/mircea-dusa/stiri-mircea-dusa/mircea-dusa-441-769-de-romani-din-strainatate-au-drept-de-vot-1205960>, accessed on 12.02.2013.

on the estimations) of the Romanian citizens could actually exercise their voting rights while living abroad. Even for this category, voting costs are quite high because it implied going to the Romanian consulates in the host country where polling stations were organized by the Romanian Foreign Ministry.

Figure 2: Increasing stocks of Romanian citizens in EU15 countries, 1997-2009



Source: own elaboration based on data from Holland, et al. (2011)

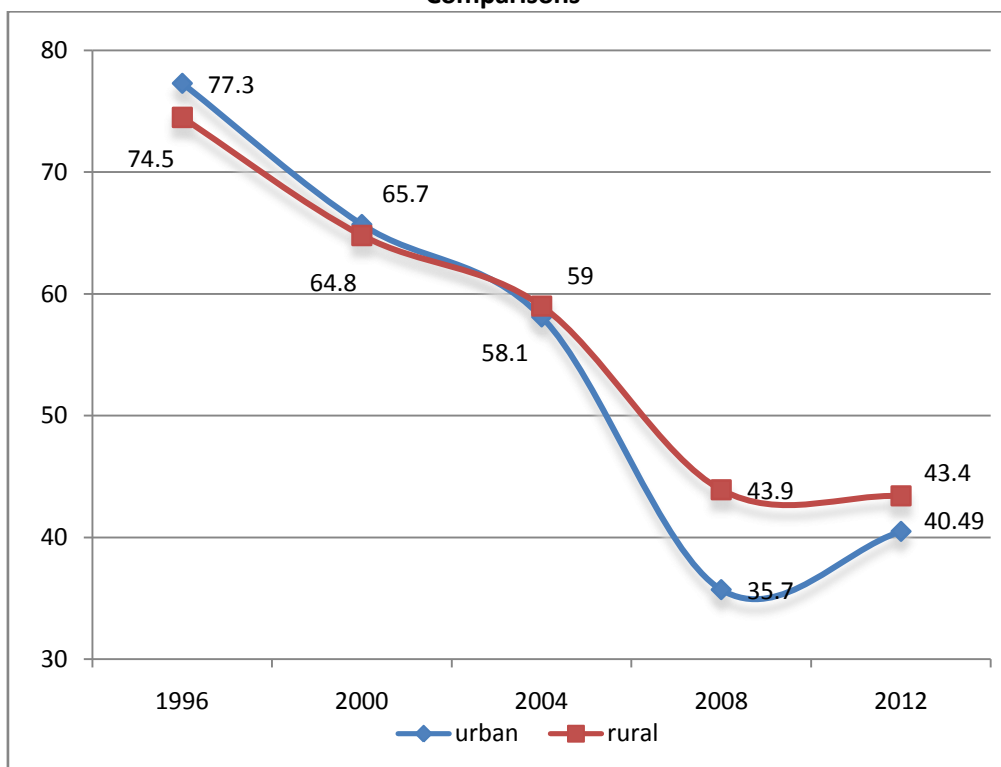
Moreover, for Romanians working abroad without having permanent residence in the host country, voting costs (time, money, and so on) are downright prohibitive because they should return to Romania in order to vote in their locality of residence. In spite of these figures, turnout is calculated as a percentage of those who went to the polls of all those who are enrolled in the electoral lists⁵. The relatively large stock of Romanians working/living abroad and enrolled in the electoral lists in Romania, combined with the high “costs” of voting these citizens face, significantly lowers the degree of turnout reported by Romanian officials. For instance, turnout would have been with 7-8 percentages higher in the Romanian parliamentary elections of 2012 if the Romanians working abroad would not have been taken into account in calculating the level of turnout.

⁵ Officially reported turnout (%) = 100* those who went to the polls / those who are enrolled in the electoral lists.

The urban-rural electoral divide in post-communist Romania

Another relevant variable explaining electoral participation in Romania is the place of residence. Urban areas faced a more pronounced turnout decline than rural ones (Figure 3). If in the 1996 and 2000 elections urban residents voted in higher proportions than those in rural areas, this trend has been reversed since the parliamentary elections of 2004 when rural residents went to the polls at a higher rate. The parliamentary elections of 2008 consolidated this new trend as in rural areas there has been a turnout rate of 43.9%, compared to only 35.7% in urban areas. In 2012, voter turnout in urban areas was again lower than in rural areas (40.49% to 43.40%).

Figure 3: Turnout in Romanian parliamentary elections 1996-2012: Urban-Rural Comparisons



Source: author's elaboration based on data available from Alexandru Moraru & Ercuș (2009), for the 1996-2008 elections and data available on the website of the Central Electoral Commission, for the 2012 parliamentary elections, <http://www.becparlamentare2012.ro>.

Note: Data refer to turnout in parliamentary elections.

The reversing electoral participation trend, so that it became higher in rural compared to urban areas, has several potential explanations. During the 1990s, the larger urban electoral participation could be the consequence of higher political awareness of city dwellers mainly due to easier access to media and especially to television channels⁶. In addition, the instability and inconsistency of Romanian party system during the 1990s prevented the formation and consolidation of strong local party organizations that could penetrate social networks and effectively mobilize voters during election campaigns. In the absence of highly politicized local mobilizing agents, the dissemination of political messages in election campaigns was mainly done through the media (especially television), and urban residents were thus advantaged in terms of access to political information.

The informational advantage of the urban residents diminished gradually with the expansion of private cable / satellite television networks in rural areas too. In addition, the crystallization and consolidation of the party system after the general election of 2000 is accompanied by the formation of genuine electoral fiefs at local and county levels, having strong political leaders and local party organizations that control and repeatedly win elections in certain localities.

In addition, re-elected mayors for several consecutive terms acquired political experience and increased their capacity to mobilize voters in local and national electoral campaigns. Moreover, the ability to mobilize voters is more pronounced in rural areas, since rural communities in Romania are usually smaller and better "bounded" than urban ones, social and interpersonal relations are usually better developed and more dense ("everybody knows everyone"), direct contacts between mobilizing entrepreneurs and voters are facile ("door to door" electoral campaigns entail lower costs) and the ability to monitor the electoral behavior of citizens is higher and hence chances of any sanctions / rewards, for those who do not vote / vote in a certain way, are higher⁷.

Therefore, rural localities provide political organizations a better control over local electoral contexts and this could be one of the explanations of the high

⁶ In the 1990s, the majority of rural residents had limited access to private television stations, the most watched in rural areas being the public television station (TVR).

⁷ Media repeatedly presented cases where rural localities' mayors were threatening persons with a precarious financial situation that they will no longer receive social benefits provided by the municipality if they do not vote as the mayor indicated. Media also covered cases in which some political entrepreneurs offered illegal rewards / incentives to citizens in exchange of a vote for a candidate or political party. Such „electoral bribes” were more frequently reported in rural areas, compared to urban ones.

stakes that some political leaders have attributed to electoral competition in rural localities after 2000. The political strategy of "conquering" rural areas is closely linked to the growing importance given to local elections (winning as many mayor positions to politically control and mobilize local communities) as well as to the political migration of mayors⁸ and the politicization of access to redistributive resources (mayors belonging to opposition parties switching to the party in power in return for access to resources). The "battle" for rural areas had also an effect in terms of political mobilization for parliamentary elections that later materialized both by a higher rate of voter turnout and an increased level of political partisanship in rural areas.

Regarding the different degrees of participation in local compared to parliamentary elections, 2008 is a premiere. For the first time since the fall of communism, local elections recorded a significantly higher rate of participation than parliamentary ones: 48.79% versus 39.2%. Turnout in local elections had a sinuous evolution over time: decreased from 1992 to 2000, then increased in 2004 to decrease in 2008 and increase again in 2012. However, over the period analyzed here, the losses in terms of turnout in local elections (from about 65% in 1992 to 56% in 2012) were much lower than in the parliamentary elections (from about 86% in 1990 to around 41% in 2012).

Higher rates of participation in local elections in 2008 and 2012 compared to the Parliamentary ones could be the outcome of several cumulated trends. These developments can be summarized as: increased political trust in local institutions (C. Tufiş, 2007) compared with the confidence in national political institutions that has dramatically decreased during the early 1990s, and remained thereafter stabilized at a relatively low level; an increasing influence of local political actors in mobilizing voters combined with their direct interest and involved in local electoral campaigns to win political offices; increased political efficacy manifested by the perception that citizens can influence local decisions to a greater extent than the national ones; increasing coverage of local electoral campaigns through the development of local and regional media (Matiuța et al., 2012 apud. ; Tătar, 2011b). The growing turnout in recent local elections in Romania could indicate a new trend of Romanian politics. The increasing importance given to

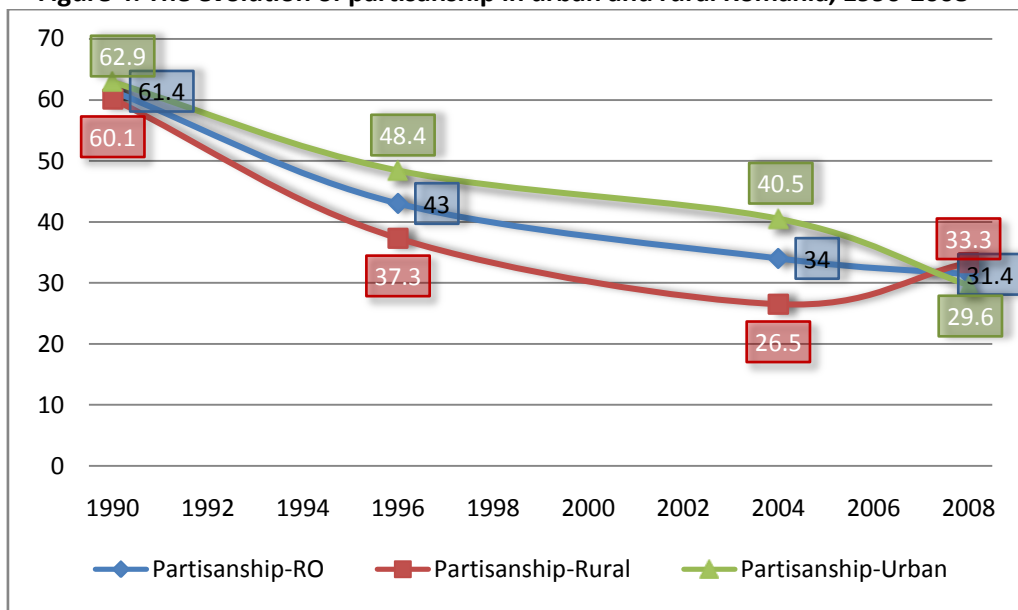
⁸ Political migration of locally elected representatives in Romania was prohibited by law under the sanction of losing the mandate, while Romanian MPs can pass from one party to another without losing their parliamentary mandate.

electing local decision-makers constitutes a ferment that may lay the ground for more profound changes in the political life in Romania, to prepare for wider decentralization and regionalization processes (Țăranu, 2009).

Partisanship: dynamics and a typology of voters/non-voters in post-communist Romania

Political partisanship (defined here as feeling closeness to a political party) decreases in post-communist Romania in a similar vein as turnout in elections⁹ (Figure 4). If in 1990 partisanship was at relatively high rates both in rural and urban areas (around 60%) in the coming years there has been a gradual decline in the percentage of those who feel close to a party, decline more pronounced in rural areas. Available data show the difference between urban and rural areas to peak in 2004 when rural residents had a level of partisanship by about 14 percentage points lower than those in urban areas.

Figure 4: The evolution of partisanship in urban and rural Romania, 1990-2008



Source: Personal elaboration based on data PCP1 (1990), CSES1 (1996), CSES2 (2004), ESS4 (2008).

⁹ Individual level data (ESS4 post-electoral survey) concerning voting in the Romanian parliamentary elections of 2008 show a statistically significant association between political partisanship and turnout [$\chi^2(1) = 276.54, p < 0.001, N = 2089$]. Effect size of partisanship on turnout (Phi = 0.364) is medium, according to Cohen's (1988) criteria.

By 2008, the percentage of those who felt close to a political party increased in rural areas by about 5 percentage points, while in urban areas continued to decline by nearly 11 percentage points. Given a positive relationship between partisanship and voting in elections, increased partisanship in rural zones and a continued decline in urban areas (2004-2008) is one of the factors that contributed to the higher voter participation rate in rural compared to urban zones in the 2008 parliamentary elections.

In this paper, citizens are classified by their voting behavior (voters respectively non-voters) and their partisanship (feel close to a party or not). Combining the two criteria, four categories have yielded (see Table 1): 'Partisan voters', 'Pragmatic or individualist voters', 'Partisan non-voters', and 'Individualist non-Voters'. **Partisan voters** are those who voted in the last elections and feel close to at least one political party. **Pragmatic voters** (non-partisans) are those who voted in the last elections but are not close to any political party. **Individualist non-voters** are those who do not feel close to any party and did not vote in the last elections, while **Partisan non-voters** are those who feel close to a political party even though they did not vote in the last parliamentary elections.

Table 1: A typology of voters/non-voters

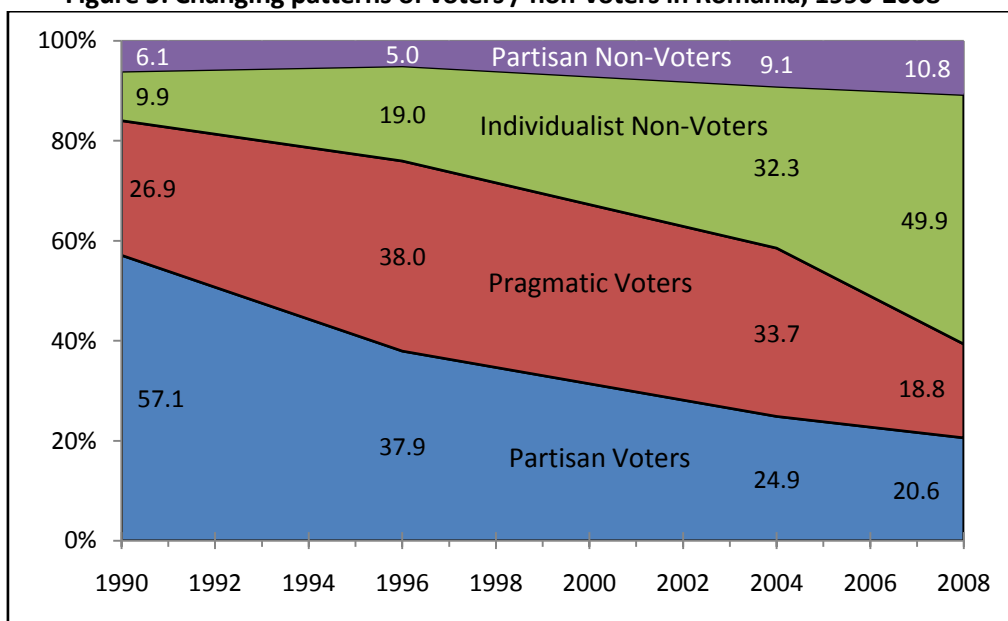
		Voter	
		Yes	No
Partisanship	Yes	Partisan Voters	Partisan Non-Voters
	No	Pragmatic Voters	Individualist Non-Voters

Source: author's own elaboration

Figure 5 illustrates that in post-communist Romania the share of those who do not vote in elections has significantly increased. Non-voters are mostly people who do not feel close to any political party – 'Individualist non-voters' (from 9.9% in 1990 to 49.9 % in 2008). In contrast, the category 'Partisan non-voters' remains relatively constant over time (from 6.1% in 1990, reaching 10.8% in 2008). On the other hand, the share of voters diminishes significantly in the period, but the sharpest fall is registered within the type of 'Partisan voters' (from 57% to 20.6%).

The percentage of 'Pragmatic voters' also drops but not as dramatically (from 26.9% to 18.8%). While in 1990, about two-thirds of those who voted declared themselves close to at least one party (partisans), in 2008 only slightly more than half of the voters were partisans. In other words, since 1990 the relative weight of 'Pragmatic voters' has increased in the total turnout in parliamentary elections, while the relative share of 'Partisans voters' has decreased. The sharp decrease of the share of partisan voters raises questions both about political parties' electoral credibility and their ability to retain voters from one election round to another. Electoral volatility¹⁰ between elections increased significantly in the transition period of the 1990s. For instance the PCP survey (waves 1 and 2) shows that about 91% of those surveyed at the end of 1990 kept their vote intention for the party they had voted for in the elections of May 1990, while in 1998 only about 74 % said they would vote the same party they had voted for in the parliamentary elections held in the fall of 1996.

Figure 5: Changing patterns of voters / non-voters in Romania, 1990-2008



Note: % in columns

Source: Personal elaboration based on PCP1 (1990), CSES1 (1996), CSES2 (2004), ESS4 (2008).

¹⁰ The fluctuations of Romanian voters' choices in the transition period are difficult to explain and assess accurately because beyond the personal assessments of citizens ("the party I voted for did a good/ bad job") volatility may be the result of systemic factors such as increased party system instability manifested by the disappearance/appearance of parties, mergers/schisms of parties, etc.

The spectrum of types of voters / non-voters: how different are they?

How big are the differences between the four types of voters / non-voters listed above? Among the items examined in Table 2 it appears that the greatest attitudinal differences are among partisan voters and individualist non-voters. Between these two polar categories shall be placed pragmatic voters and partisan non-voters. Partisan voters (about 20% of all citizens entitled to vote in the parliamentary elections of November 2008) are more interested in politics than the general public and also spend more time watching political issues on television. A similar profile, in terms of political interest and political information provided by television, stands for non-partisan voters (about 10% in the 2008 elections): 35.2% watch political news on TV for more than 1 hour and a half daily (compared to 35.6% of partisans voters), and 52.3% are interested in politics (against 62.7% of partisan voters). Instead, pragmatic voters and individualist non-voters are less interested in politics and therefore invest less time in getting information about politics.

Partisan voters and non-voters have similar attitudes in terms of political interest and the understanding of political issues. However, the two groups differ significantly in terms of the trust they have in Parliament and politicians. Trust, or better said lack of trust in political actors seems to be one of the key factors that determine the individualist non-voters not to go to the polls. Generally, those who do not vote tend not to trust politicians or the institutions of representative democracy. Individualist non-voters generally mistrust other people (only 21.3% tend to trust most people), and this distinguishes them from partisan non-voters who are significantly more confident in other persons (31.1% consider that most people can be trusted). Also, voters usually have a higher degree of trust than individualist non-voters (30.4% of partisan voters and 26.3% of pragmatic voters believe they can trust most people). Lack of trust in other people is probably one of the factors that prevent non-voters to build those community and interpersonal relationships that stimulate greater civic participation. Summarizing, the data in Table 2 suggest that neither voters nor the category of non-voters are homogeneous, and the decision to participate or not in elections is probably based on different determinants for each of the four types of voters/non-voters analyzed above.

Table 2: The spectrum of voters / non-voters: how different are they?

	Partisan Voters	Pragmatic Voters	Individualist Non-Voters	Partisan Non- Voters	Sample Average
Follow political news on TV more than 1 ½ hour per day	35.6	27.7	19.8	35.2	26.3
Interested in politics	62.7	39.2	23.3	52.3	37.5
Politics is often considered complicated	36.8	39.0	49.9	40.2	44.0
Finds it difficult to decide on political issues	18.6	25.8	27.8	23.7	25.0
No trust at all in Parliament	9.9	15.0	24.1	18.3	18.8
No trust at all in politicians	16.2	19.5	32.7	21.8	25.6
Tend to trust most people	30.4	26.3	21.3	31.1	25.2

Note: Data are % within each category of voters / non-voters who have the above features. All variables listed in the table are significantly associated ($p < 0.01$) with the types of voters / non-voters but the effect size varies from low to moderate values (Cramer's V coefficient values between 0.083 and 0.331)
Source: Author's elaboration based on ESS4, Romania (2008/2009).

How to explain that although some people feel close to a political party they tend not to vote ("partisan non-voters")? I believe that the partisan non-vote can be interpreted both as a form of expressing dissatisfaction and as a non-voting strategy based on a rational calculation. On the one hand, the partisan non-voters could be included in the category of those who were somewhat disappointed with the performance or decisions taken by certain politicians from the party they feel close to. On the other hand, partisan non-voters might consider the stakes of elections as being very low and therefore it is not worthy to go to vote or that elections are not competitive and the party they support will win or lose the elections anyway, with or without their vote (i.e. their vote will not bring an additional number of parliamentary seats to the party, but it will neither reduce the number of seats won) (Tătar, 2011a).

Socio-demographic characteristics of voters/non-voters: who they are?

Beyond particular attitudes and motivations which differentiate the types of voters/non-voters discussed above, they also have some distinct socio-demographic and occupational characteristics. Table 3 reveals such differences among voters/non-voters. Thus, men are generally more partisan than women (in the sense that they feel in greater proportion close to a party): 24.8% of men are partisan voters compared to only 17.4% of women and 11.4% of men are partisan non-voters, compared to 10.3% of women. Women tend to be rather part of the group of pragmatic voters: 53.3% of women vs. 45.4% of men.

Both partisanship and the likelihood of voting increase with age. Older people have a greater influence on the outcome of elections precisely because turnout in these age cohorts is higher than in younger generations. On the other hand, wishing to maximize their vote share, political parties and leaders will likely give more attention to requests coming from groups of older persons, simply because politicians know that the elderly come out to vote in higher proportions than younger people. People having between 50-65 years recorded the highest proportion of partisan (29.1%) and pragmatic voters (22.6%) and the lowest percentage of individualist non-voters (38.8%). Participation and partisanship register an obvious setback after the age of 65-70 years, a fact revealed by data in Table 3. At the other end of the scale of participation and partisanship are young people who are less likely to vote, whether or not close to a political party. Thus, among persons aged between 18 and 29 years are recorded the fewest partisan (11.6%) and pragmatic voters (13.5%). The vast majority of people in this age group are non-voters who do not feel close to any party (individualist non-voters 63.8%).

Married persons participate in higher proportions in elections, whether they identify or not with a political party: 22.5% of those who are married are partisan voters, and 21.1% are pragmatic voters, compared to only 15.5% of unmarried persons who are partisan voters and 15.8% who are pragmatic voters. Unmarried people are mostly non-voters who do not feel close to any political party (58.3%). In addition, people who have children tend to be in higher proportions partisan (22.5%) or pragmatic voters (21.1%) than those without children (19.6% are partisan voters and 17.5% pragmatic voters). Just as in the case of unmarried individuals, most people without children are part of individualist non-voters category.

Table 3: Socio-demographic characteristics of the types of voters / non-voters

Socio-demographic characteristics	Partisan Voters	Pragmatic Voters	Individualist Non-Voters	Partisan Non-Voters	Total
Gender					
Male	24.8%	18.3%	45.4%	11.4%	100.0%
Female	17.4%	19.1%	53.3%	10.3%	100.0%
Age					
18-29	11.6%	13.5%	63.8%	11.0%	100.0%
30-49	19.1%	19.3%	48.8%	12.8%	100.0%
50-65	29.1%	22.6%	38.8%	9.5%	100.0%
65+	24.7%	20.3%	46.8%	8.2%	100.0%
Marital status					
Married	24.6%	21.0%	43.3%	11.1%	100.0%
Unmarried	15.5%	15.8%	58.3%	10.4%	100.0%
Education					
	NS, p>0.05				
Primary school / apprentice	20.7%	19.9%	47.9%	11.5%	100.0%
High school / post-secondary	20.5%	18.7%	50.8%	10.1%	100.0%
Graduate / postgraduate	21.6%	15.3%	53.0%	10.1%	100.0%
Participation in religious services					
Weekly or more often	26.1%	23.8%	40.0%	10.1%	100.0%
Monthly or just at holidays	21.3%	17.7%	47.4%	13.6%	100.0%
More rarely or never	16.9%	17.0%	57.6%	8.6%	100.0%
Residence					
Rural	37.0%	37.5%	21.0%	4.5%	100.0%
Urban	32.7%	26.5%	33.7%	7.1%	100.0%
Children					
Has children	22.5%	21.1%	42.4%	13.9%	100.0%
No children	19.6%	17.5%	53.8%	9.1%	100.0%
Household income (RON)					
	NS, p>0.05				
Less than 900	18.9%	21.6%	47.8%	11.7%	100.0%
901-1200	26.3%	19.4%	43.6%	10.7%	100.0%
1201-1750	26.4%	17.2%	44.2%	12.2%	100.0%
1751-3000	23.4%	17.3%	49.5%	9.8%	100.0%
Above 3000	19.5%	13.8%	50.9%	15.7%	100.0%

Socio-demographic characteristics	Partisan Voters	Pragmatic Voters	Individualist Non-Voters	Partisan Non-Voters	Total
<i>Employed in ...</i>					
Central/local government	26.2%	16.8%	43.9%	13.1%	100.0%
Other public sectors (e.g. education, health)	26.0%	20.7%	44.7%	8.7%	100.0%
State-owned enterprises (SOEs)	30.5%	19.3%	40.3%	9.8%	100.0%
Private companies	17.0%	15.7%	54.2%	13.1%	100.0%
Their own businesses	21.4%	14.3%	51.8%	12.5%	100.0%
Other	14.3%	33.3%	46.0%	6.3%	100.0%
<i>Managerial position</i>					
Yes	29.4%	14.1%	41.2%	15.3%	100.0%
No	21.3%	18.6%	48.9%	11.2%	100.0%
<i>Trade unionist</i>					
Yes	31.7%	15.7%	39.3%	13.3%	100.0%
No	16.7%	19.1%	53.8%	10.3%	100.0%
<i>S/he has worked abroad for more than six months</i>					
Yes	12.7%	5.5%	61.8%	20.0%	100.0%
No	23.1%	19.1%	46.4%	11.4%	100.0%

Note: % on lines. Variables displayed (except education and household income) are significantly associated with the types of voters / non-voters ($p < 0.01$), but the effect size (Cramer's V coefficient < 0.200) remains generally weak.

Source: author's elaboration based on data ESS4, Romania (2008-2009).

Explanatory models of political participation conventionally include both education and income as important resources for political activism. The ESS4 post-electoral survey data reveal that neither formal education (measured here by the highest level of education completed by each respondent) nor income appear to be significant resources for participation, at least not for electoral participation and for partisanship in Romania, 2008.

The type of organization in which an individual is working is significantly associated with the type of participant/non-participant to whom s/he belongs. A first differentiation can be made between employees in the public and private sectors. But, as we shall see below, the two categories are also heterogeneous with significant differences within each sector. In general, public sector

employees have higher levels of turnout and partisanship than those in the private sector. This could be explained by the fact that, in a highly politicized Romanian public sector, employees give greater relevance to elections, precisely because they more sharply perceive that their professional careers and their financial situation could be significantly and directly influenced (in good or bad) by the decisions taken by the rulers, which win the elections. For example, the reduction or increase of wages, the layoffs or the levels of employment in the Romanian public sector are directly dependent on the political decisions of those that win election. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that public sector employees compared to the private sector ones could perceive the stakes of elections as more important.

Moreover, significant differences exist not only between public and private sectors, but also among public sector employees. Public sector employees that usually receive negative media coverage for being highly politicized especially work in the public administration, where it is believed that ruling parties are hiring their "cronies" (generally as senior public servants). Data in Table 3 seem to contradict this widely held view among the Romanian public. The group of citizens that express the highest degree of electoral participation and political partisanship is not made up of civil servants but of those employed in state owned enterprises (SOEs). Thus, among SOEs the share of partisan voters (30.5%) is higher compared to other public sector organizations (i.e. central or local public administration 26.2%, education and health 26%) or private sector organizations (private companies 17%, own business 21,4%). In addition, employees of state enterprises generally vote in higher proportions than other categories of employees in the public or private sectors.

How can one explain greater levels of partisanship and electoral participation among employees of the state owned companies? The available data suggest that in fact the bulk of party "cronies" is not employed in public administration, as is commonly believed, but precisely in state owned companies, where the wage level is higher and where political appointments are less visible to the media and the public. Therefore, the public discourse about de-politicization and professionalization of public administration refers only to one side (and perhaps not the most important) of the issue of politicized hiring in the public sector. In any case, the propensity of state enterprises employees' to vote in higher proportions than employees in other sectors could be explained by different stakes which they attribute to winning elections by the party to which they feel close to.

With massive politicized hiring in state owned enterprises (SOE), winning the election by the party they feel closest equates for many employees of state companies with keeping a well-paid job. On the other hand, losing the election by the party that controls public sector employment may precisely equate to job loss, probably according to the same political criteria on which employment has been acquired.

Data in Table 3 also suggest that those holding managerial positions, whether working in the public or private sector, tend to be in greater proportions partisan voters compared to those who have no leadership positions. In fact, this is not so. Controlling for the employment organization reveals that the association between the types of voters/non-voters and holding management positions becomes statistically insignificant for employees in all types of organizations, with the exception of employees of state-owned companies, where the relationship between variables remains significant [$\chi^2(3) = 12.61$, $p = 0.007$, $N = 407$, Cramer's V coefficient = 0.173]. Therefore, based on currently available data we can only assert that in state-owned companies, significant differences exist between employees holding managerial positions and the rest of employees.

The biggest differences among employees of state companies is noted with regard to the partisan voters category: 48.3% of the respondents holding managerial positions are voters that declare closeness to a political party, compared to only 28% of those without managerial positions. Since the proximity to a political party might be a measure of political partisanship, the holders of the management positions in state-owned companies display a greater degree of partisanship than other types of employees. This could be due to the fact that people close to parties, especially those who actually make their political clientele, are more often placed in management positions in SOEs rather than in subordinate positions.

As it concerns those who have worked for more than 6 months abroad during the past 10 years, the data in Table 3 suggest that they are rather disconnected from the electoral process in Romania, at least for the 2008 elections. Thus, among those who had work experience in another country only 12.7% are partisan voters, 5.5% are pragmatic voters and over 81% did not vote in the elections of November 2008 (61.8 % are individualist non-voters, while 20% partisan non-voters).

Conclusion

In the last 20 years of democratic reconstruction in Romania, we can notice a general decline of turnout in parliamentary elections. Two of the main factors influencing this trend are political disaffection of a significant part of the citizenry, on the one hand, and an increasing stock of the Romanians working abroad, on the other hand. In sum, relatively few of the 2-3 millions of Romanian citizens working abroad can vote for the Romanian parliamentary elections in the host countries of residence at the polling stations organized by the Romanian Foreign Ministry. Instead, most of them need to return to Romania to vote for these elections. Although they are included in the calculation of turnout, the costs of voting under these circumstances are prohibitive and most of the Romanians working abroad do not vote in the Romanian parliamentary elections.

However, lower participation in the Romanian parliamentary elections of those who have worked abroad is associated not only with higher participation costs but also with less interest in politics, greater mistrust in national state institutions and especially distrust of politicians. It's very likely that many of those who have gone abroad to work have been of those disappointed with how things went during the transition period (i.e. the lack of well paid jobs to ensure a decent living, etc.). They are those who, in the wording of Comsa (2006), do not trust and do not expect a political solution to ensure the welfare for the many, thus trying to find their own alternative solutions and obtain higher standards of living outside the country (i.e. "Exit" strategy).

Turnout decrease in Romanian parliamentary elections is unevenly distributed on different areas of residence and this paper shows a persistent urban-rural divide with higher rates of electoral participation in rural zones. In Romania, rural dwellers do not necessarily participate in elections and display higher attachments towards political parties because they are more interested in politics or have more political expertise than their urban counterparts, but particularly because rural localities provide political organizations and leaders a better control over local electoral contexts. This in turn has an effect in terms of political mobilization strategies for parliamentary elections that materialized both by a higher rate of voter turnout and an increased level of political partisanship in rural areas.

After having examined the trends of electoral participation in post-communist Romania, I have constructed a typology of voters/non-voters and then

examined the evolution of the share of partisan and individualist/pragmatic voters from 1990 to 2008. The aggregated partisanship decrease in post-communist Romania follows a similar pattern with overall turnout decline in parliamentary elections, suggesting a link between the two. The association between partisanship and electoral participation is also confirmed by individual level analyses (Tătar, 2011c). However, turnout decline is unevenly distributed among different types of voters. The most dramatic downturn occurs in the case of partisan voters who represented 57% of the voting population in 1990, and only around 20% in 2008. The percentage of pragmatic-individualist voters (who do not identify with any party) also decreased but not as dramatically: from 26.9% in 1990 to 18.8% in 2008. This raises questions about the credibility of the Romanian political parties and their ability to retain voters from one election round to another. On this track, the scope of this research can be furthered by an analysis of the stability of party attachments and their influence on electoral volatility.

Beside these trends, there are significant attitudinal and socio-demographic differences between partisan and non-partisan voters. In terms of political expertise, non-partisan voters (i.e. pragmatic voters) are not necessarily more politically sophisticated than partisan voters. On the contrary, partisanship seems to work: 1) as a way to reduce the costs for processing political information at the individual level; 2) as a means to express belonging to a group 3) as a means to strengthen the sentiment that individuals can exercise some degree of control over the political environment in which they live (political efficacy). All these 3 functions of partisanship increase people's "political saliency, that is, the relative importance citizens attach to politics" (Deth, 2006, p. 106). For example, data in Table 2 reveal that among those who feel close to a political party (whether voting or not) fewer are uninterested in politics and say they find it hard to decide on political issues, compared to those who are not partisans. In addition, among the partisan voters fewer believe that politics is complicated, compared to pragmatic voters.

In contrast, individualist non-voters are often less interested in the political process, believe that politics is a complicated activity that they often do not understand, and consequently follow political news less or not at all. In the absence of relevant political knowledge and political party preference, individualist non-voters find it difficult to decide when it comes to political issues in general. Regarding elections, their decision is not to participate. Further studies might

better clarify the nexus between partisanship and political alienation, taking into consideration that in Romania individuals who do not feel closeness to any political party are usually characterized also by low political competence and lack of interest for politics (C. D. Tufiş, 2010).

On a more general level, partisanship in Romania seems to be a variable endogenous to the political process which highly correlates with other political factors. This appears to contradict the initial conception of party identification (party ID) as “an exogenous variable affecting politics but not being affected by politics” (Holmberg, 2007, p. 563) set forth in *The American Voter*, while suggesting that partisanship in the new Eastern European democracies is mainly based on direct experience with post-communist politics and it is most probably negatively marked by the political disaffection a significant part of the post-communist citizenry might have felt during the transition period. This could be an explanation for relatively few and decreasing numbers of party identifiers in this region. However, empirical analyses show that partisanship remains one of the significant factors differentiating between voters and non-voters (Tătar, 2011c) suggesting that decreasing numbers of partisans might be compensated by the increasing intensity of their attachment to political parties. Strong party identifiers could constitute the “hard core” of an electoral body generally apathetic and pessimistic regarding the ability of elections to work as a mechanism that produces social and political transformations, after experiencing repeated disappointments with the post-1989 governances (Tătar, 2011c).

Education and income, two of the socio-economic status variables that are generally linked to electoral participation, especially in Western democracies, are not significantly associated with the types of voters/non-voters in Romania, at least not in the case of the parliamentary elections of 2008. However, other socio-demographical variables significantly differentiate between various types of voters/non-voters. Thus, partisan voters tend to be in higher proportions: males, between 50-65 years old, married, residents of rural localities who attend religious services at least weekly, employed in state owned enterprises, and holding managerial positions. At the other extreme stand individualist non-voters who are usually: younger persons (age 18-29), unmarried, not attending religious services, urban dwellers without children, working in private enterprises, no trade unionists, working abroad for long periods of time. Particularly, residence and occupational status seem to be two of the most prominent factors shaping partisanship in

general, and influencing the interaction between partisanship and voting behavior, in particular. Further studies should elaborate and more rigorously test these hypotheses not only for the case of Romania, but also in a comparative context.

Notes

1. This article elaborates on several parts of an unpublished chapter of the PhD thesis "Political Participation and Democracy in Romania after 1989" defended by the author at the University of Oradea in 2011.
2. A more detailed and multivariate examination (logistic regression) of the predictors of electoral participation in Romania can be found in Tătar (2011c), a longitudinal study which complements the bivariate analyses presented in this article.

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