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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Strategic Effects of Electoral Rules
Testing the Impact of the 2008 Electoral Reform in Romania*

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Political institutions matter. Not only do they affect political outcomes (e.g., Duverger's "mechanical effect"), but also they structure political behavior (Duverger's "psychological effect"[1]). A change in the rules governing a political institution is quite often accompanied by a change in the incentives governing the behavior of political actors. Changes of the electoral systems are no exception to this rule; as a matter of fact, they are arguably the most prominent exemplification of it.

In 2008, Romania changed the rules governing the election of the two Chambers of its Parliament (the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies), from closed party list proportional representation to a single-ballot mixed electoral system. One of the justifications offered for this change (in fact, the reason that was the most widely discussed), was to offer Romanian voters the chance to vote for a specific candidate. One of the implications is, then, that some voters may choose based on the qualities of candidates, rather than their ideological affiliation, and may in fact prefer to vote for a candidate who does not represent their preferred party. If that happens, the reform has "personalized" the vote and, by doing so, it achieved its purpose. If this does not happen, and voters continue to choose solely based on ideological preferences and party labels, then the electoral reform has failed.

The purpose of this paper is precisely to test whether the reform did, in fact, have an effect. One way of testing this, with the benefit of hindsight, is to use aggregate returns from Romania's first parliamentary elections held under the new electoral rules (November 2008), and compare those with the results of previous parliamentary elections (2000 and 2004), held under the old rules, and see whether the patterns of regional support for various political parties do change as a result of the aforementioned institutional reform. We develop a model of electoral behavior at the individual level which has observable

* This research was supported by a CNCS-UEFISCDI grant, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669 ("Change and Stability in Romanian Electoral Behaviour, 2009-2014").

1 Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1966, pp. 224-226.

implications at the aggregate level[2]. We formalize these implications into hypotheses that we test with empirical data, the results of which indicate whether the electoral reform was successful or not.

Types of Electoral Systems and "Personal" Vote: Previous Research

There have been a number of studies on the effects of electoral systems on personalizing the vote. Carey and Shugart develop a ranking of electoral systems according to the degree to which they increase the incentives to cultivate a personal vote[3]. According to them, the likelihood of a personal vote increases with the increase in the freedom of choice for voters and with a decrease in party leaders' control over candidate nomination. For instance, they rank the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) without party leadership control over nomination as the "zenith in the value of personal reputation relative to party reputation"[4]. Other systems that rank high are plurality systems that use primaries, because they create intraparty competition and party leaders cannot decide who will use the party label. The new Romanian electoral system used for the 2008 parliamentary elections falls, according to this ranking, somewhere in the middle. While it is more conducive to a personal vote compared to the previous system of party list PR, the party still controls the nomination and the party reputation still matters because the votes of a party's candidates are pooled, determining the party's share of the seats in the legislature[5].

Other authors using alternative classifications of electoral systems arrive at similar conclusions. Grofman, for instance, divide the Carey and Shugart

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[2] This kind of approach (making inferences from the aggregate level to the individual level) is prone to the so-called "ecological fallacy". For instance, if we observe that the French National Front receives a higher share of the vote in regions with a higher percentage of immigrants, it would be wrong to infer that it is the immigrants who constitute the core electorate of the National Front. Nonetheless, we believe this potential problem is mitigated (largely, even if not fully), in the present research: we are mostly interested in*change* at the individual level (i.e., how and why the voters of party X *change* their vote, rather than describing the profile of these voters). However, it wouldbe clearly better to confirm our preliminary findings with individual-level data.

[3] John M. Carey, Matthew Sobert Shugart, "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1995, pp. 417-439.

[4] *Ibidem*, p. 429.

[5] It is interesting to note what Carey and Shugart discuss as the downside of the personal vote, although it is not the subject of our study: "More attention by legislators to personal reputation would generally lead to more 'pork' in a country's budgets […] Where, on the other hand, party reputation matters more, policymaking should be more 'efficient'" (*Ibidem*, pp. 433-434).

index of "incentives to cultivate a personal vote" into two components: the degree of party-centeredness of the electoral system and the size of a legislator's electoral constituency, i.e., the number of voters who voted for a candidate[6]. While their classification of electoral systems using their own criteria provides different results than those of Carey and Shugart for a number of electoral systems, such as the single transferable vote (STV) and the single non-transferable vote (SNTV), it gives similar results for the mixed electoral systems, located in an intermediate position. Comparable results, but more difficult to interpret, are those of Pereira and e Silva, because they do not consider the very peculiar type of electoral system used in Romania in 2008. Pereira and e Silva develop an index of citizens' freedom to choose the members of parliament as a function of ballot structure, district magnitude, and electoral formulas[7]. They find that STV, open ballot and open party list offer maximum freedom of choice to voters, while ranking mixed systems at an intermediate level of freedom.

Other works focused on different aspects of mixed electoral systems. In a study of New Zealand elections, Karp[8] is concerned with a possible contamination effect from candidates to parties in mixed systems. In those systems, where voters have the option of choosing the candidates, their strong preference for a candidate may influence their vote for the party, though it is the latter that will ultimately determine the partisan composition of the legislature. This applies mainly to two-ballot mixed systems, but it could also be extrapolated to the concomitant election of the two chambers of the Romanian Parliament in 2008, when a voter's support for a candidate for one of the Chambers could have driven his/her party vote for the other chamber. Karp's findings suggest a limited "coattail effect".

An important question for the new democracies, where party systems are weak and poorly institutionalized, is to what extent voters react to the incentives created by electoral rules. Moser and Scheiner address this question looking specifically at ticket-splitting in mixed electoral systems in post-communist countries[9]. Their results show a much higher prevalence of ticket-splitting and strategic voting in established democracies, where sophisticated voters make

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6 Bernard Grofman, "Comparisons among Electoral Systems: Distinguishing between Localism and Candidate-Centered Politics", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 24, no.4, pp. 735-740.

7 Paulo Trigo Pereira, João Andrade e Silva, "Citizens' Freedom to Choose Representatives: Ballot Structure, Proportionality and 'Fragmented' Parliaments", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2009, pp. 101-110.

8 Jeffrey A. Karp, "Candidate Effects and Spill-Over in Mixed Systems: Evidence from New Zealand", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2009, pp. 41-50.

9 Robert G. Moser, Ethan Schneier, "Strategic Voting in Established and New Democracies: Ticket Splitting in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2009, pp. 51-61.

strategic calculations in order to improve the outcome. In contrast to this, ticket-splitting and strategic voting in new democracies occur to a lesser extent, due to the difficulty for the voters to gain sufficient information in order to differentiate the strengths of the candidates.

The literature discussed above leaves us with unclear expectations about the potential effects of the Romanian electoral reform. First, mixed electoral systems tend to fall into a grey middle area where no outcome appears as a surprise. Second, in new democracies, institutions are not expected to generate similar effects as in established democracies, at least in the short run. The expectation that emerges, however, based on previous research, is that the impact of the recent electoral reform is likely to be limited by two factors: the persistence of party control over the nomination process and the difficulties voters face in trying to make informed decisions.

The Politics of Electoral Reform in Romania

Discussions about reforming the Romanian electoral law began as early as 1995, but electoral reform has never been able to achieve strong support among the main political parties. This has remained largely true even when reform was eventually adopted in 2008, which explains the long delays during the adoption process and, most of all, the minimalist character of the reform. The outcome seemed more of an effort in damage control by parliamentary parties, rather than a well-designed plan intended to achieve a genuine reform. The idea originated with a civil society organization, Asociația Pro Democrația (APD), which in 1995 initiated a bill aimed at reforming the existing electoral system, a party-list proportional representation, with a mixed system for the election of the lower house and a single-member district system for the election of the Senate[10]. The aim of this reform was to increase the responsibility of members of Parliament (MPs) and their ties with their constituents[11].

From 1998 to 2008, APD organized four campaigns with the goals to make its initiative known to the general public and gather the 250,000 required signatures to introduce the bill as a citizens' initiative. Failing to collect the necessary number of signatures, APD attempted to rally the support of one of the major political parties. Even in 2003, after several APD campaigns and the collection of over 161,000 signatures on its legislative proposal, many MPs were unaware of the differences between various electoral systems and their

[10] Laura Munteanu (Bretea), *La Réforme Electorale Roumaine*, Master's thesis, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2008.

[11] ASOCIAȚIA PRO DEMOCRAȚIA, *Votul uninominal: întrebări frecvente*, http://www.apd.ro/votuluninominal/intrebari_frecvente.php (accessed August 12, 2014).

consequences, while the parliamentary parties lacked a clear position regarding electoral reform[12]. The APD campaigns, however, succeeded in attracting public support for the bill. Their catchphrase was "*uninominal* vote", reflecting the proposal to elect representatives in single member districts (SMDs). Opinion polls conducted after 2000 showed that over 60% of Romanians favored electoral reform, despite the fact that a majority of them (76%) knew little or nothing at all about the new proposal and only 17% were well informed, according to the same polls[13].

In subsequent years, APD exercised systematic pressure over the five parliamentary parties through a variety of campaigns, workshops, and street events about electoral reforms. Three of these parties, which declared their support for reform (the National Liberal Party-PNL, the Democratic-Liberal Party-PD-L, and the Party of Social Democracy-PSD), began working together in a parliamentary commission established in 2006 to amend the APD bill, but there was little progress. PRM (the Greater Romania Party) rejected the reform, while the ethnic UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarians) demanded guarantees that the Hungarian minority will maintain the same representation under the new system[14]. In November 2007, Romanian President Traian Băsescu called a referendum on electoral reform, but the reform was not the one debated in the parliamentary commission, but an old alternative proposed by PSD, the majoritarian system with two rounds similar to the French system. The referendum failed due to the low turnout.

The Parliament eventually concluded negotiations and adopted the bill in March 2008. The new electoral law reflected the compromises among the major parties: it included the "uninominal" concept, with voters casting a single ballot in SMDs, but due to a corrective mechanism the final outcome is very proportional. All the seats are initially filled by majority in SMDs. The remaining seats are then redistributed at the district level to the parties passing the threshold in proportion to the overall number of votes obtained nationally. A second redistribution takes then place at the national level. According to the classification of mixed electoral systems by Massicotte and Blais, this system falls in the category of correction systems[15]. This particular variant, in which the proportion of PR seats that provide the correction is left unspecified, is

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[12] ASOCIAȚIA PRO DEMOCRAȚIA, *Ştiri, Nr. 11 (20), noiembrie 2003*, http://www.apd.ro/stiri_editie.php?id=19 (accessed March 1, 2009).

[13] The Gallup Organization Romania, *Gallup Polls 2002*, http://www.gallup.ro/romana/poll_ro/releases_ro/pr020318_ro/pr020318_ro.htm (accessed March 27, 2009).

[14] "Uninominalul: Sistem de vot disputat din faşă", *Jurnalul Naţional*, http://www.jurnalul.ro/stire-politic/uninominalul-sistem-de-vot-disputat-din-fasa-140313.html (accessed March 27, 2009).

[15] Louis Massicotte, André Blais, "Mixed Electoral Systems: A Conceptual and Empirical Survey", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 1999, pp. 341-366.

extremely rare and, to our knowledge, is not currently used for general elections anywhere else in the world. The existence of three main parties competing[16] (PSD, PD-L, and PNL), in addition to the ethnic UDMR makes it very difficult to fill in the seat through majority. The allocation of seats through redistribution takes place through a complicated process, whose outcome is difficult to predict. It was expected and, indeed, election results confirmed it, that in a few dozens electoral districts candidates gaining only the third or fourth-best result won the seat nonetheless[17]. The question, therefore, is whether the voters reacted to the incentives of the new system by voting more for candidates than for parties, or did they continue to cast an ideological vote?

Ideological vs. *Personal Voting in the 2008 Parliamentary Election*

According to the theory of "uniform partisan swing"[18], the regional support for a party or candidate in an election is typically an excellent predictor of its level of support in the following election. For example, let us assume that, in election t, lesser developed regions will support a left-wing party or candidate more than more developed regions do; in the absence of a major change (be that institutional, political, or otherwise), we will see the same pattern of support in the next election, t+1.

In *Figure 1* we see an illustration of this concept. The figure shows the percentage of the vote cast for the candidate of the left, Ion Iliescu, in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, in the 41 Romanian counties. The correlation is very high, r = .98, so Iliescu's 1996 share of the vote was indeed a very good predictor of his 2000 vote. The question is, then, if a Romanian party's results at the regional or local level in consecutive parliamentary elections prior to the electoral reform are highly correlated, will they continue to be so after the

[16] Obviously, this analysis applies to the context of the 2008 parliamentary election; the 2012 election was quite different in some important respects (most notably, the large number of seats won directly with an absolute majority by the USL [PSD-PNL] alliance).

[17] Other works analyzing the impact of the new electoral system on Romanian parliamentary elections:Cosmin G. Marian; Ronald F. King, "Plus ça change: Electoral Law Reform and the 2008 Romanian Parliamentary Elections", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 7-18; Sergiu Gherghina, George Jiglău, "Where Does the Mechanism Collapse? Understanding the 2008 Romanian Electoral System", *Representation*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2012, pp. 445-459; Ronald F. King, Cosmin G.Marian, "Antagonism and Austerity: The December 2012 Romanian Parliamentary Elections", *Electoral Studies*,vol. 34, 2014, pp. 310-315.

[18] Gary King, Ori Rosen, Martin Tanner, Alexander Wagner, *Ordinary Economic Voting Behavior in the Extraordinary Election of Adolf Hitler*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Department of Government Working Paper, 2004.

enactment of the reform? Romania had three parliamentary elections in the 2000's: in 2000, 2004 and 2008. The first two were conducted under party list PR; the last one, under the new, single ballot mixed system.

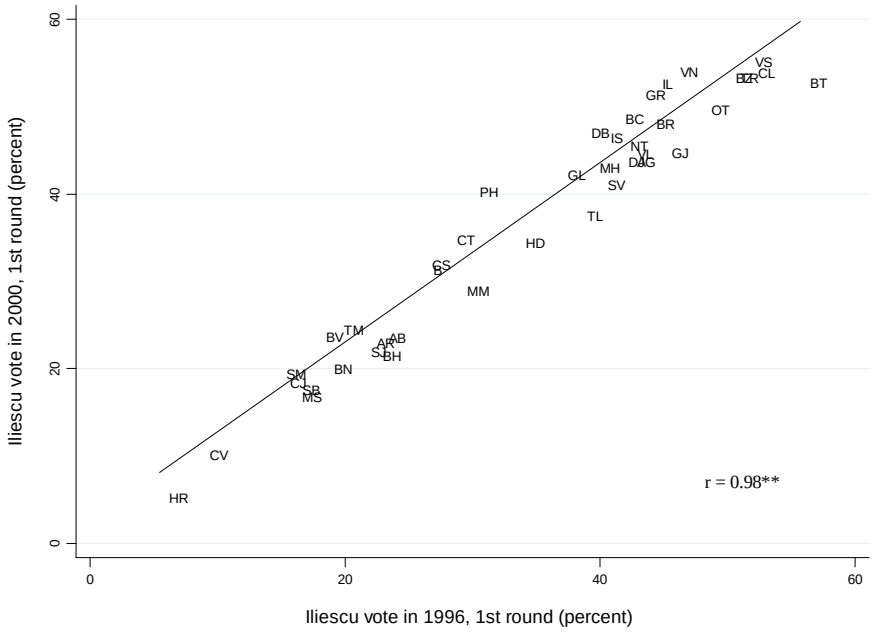

Figure 1. Uniform partisan swing in Romanian presidential elections:
County-level vote for Ion Iliescu, first round of the 1996 and 2000 elections

Let us assume that, in 2008, the electoral reform did achieve one of its stated objectives, "personalizing" the vote, and so a substantial number of voters chose the candidate that they considered the best, irrespective of partisan affiliation. If that were the case, then the 2000 vote at the locality level for a given party will be a very good predictor of the 2004 vote for the same party, since the vote was ideological in both instances. At the same time, the 2004 will be a poorer predictor of the 2008 vote, since in the latter case, the qualities of each individual candidate will play an important role, driving up or down the vote for the party they represent (*Figure 2*). In other words, if the electoral reform had any impact, we expect it to be manifest in a lower correlation between a party's results in 2004 and 2008 elections.

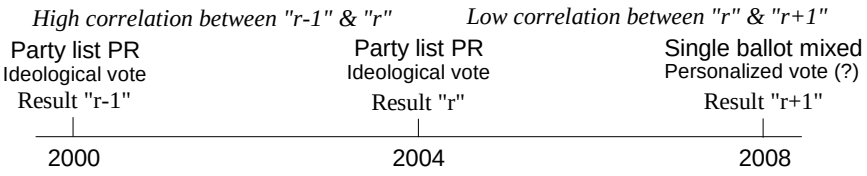

Figure 2. Electoral reform and its expected effect:
A shift from ideological voting to personalized voting?

Along with this longitudinal analysis, comparing the correlations between the locality-level results in consecutive elections, we perform an additional test. In 2000 and 2004, both Chambers of Parliament, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies were elected using party list PR. In 2008, both Chambers were elected using a single ballot mixed system, with the Senate SMDs about twice the size of the Chamber's SMDs. In 2000 and 2004, the ideological vote would lead us to expect a high correlation between the locality-level Senate and Chamber vote for a given party. In 2008, a non-ideological vote should result in a lower correlation, since it is highly unlikely that different candidates of the same party for the Senate and the Chamber will lessen or improve that party's vote at the locality level by exactly the same amount. If this condition is not fulfilled, even an unequal increase or decrease in the locality-level vote will result in a lower correlation. Summing up, if the electoral reform brought with it a shift from ideological voting to "personalized" voting, the following two hypotheses must be confirmed:

> **H1**: *Voting was strongly ideological in 2000 and 2004 and less ideological in 2008, resulting in a high correlation between the 2000 and 2004 locality level vote for a given party, but a lower correlation between the 2004 and 2008 locality level vote for the same party.*
> **H2**: *Voting was strongly ideological in 2000 and 2004 and less ideological in 2008, resulting in a high correlation between the locality level Senate and Chamber votes for a given party in both 2000 and 2004, but a lower correlation between the locality level Senate and Chamber votes for the same party in 2008.*

We test these hypotheses using locality-level data from the 2000, 2004, and 2008 parliamentary elections, for both Senate and Chamber. The data set includes about 3.000 cases (large cities, towns, and rural districts or villages). We start with an analysis of the vote for the leftist Social Democratic Party (PSD), the only large party which was continuously present as such on Romania's political scene during the last decade (*Figure 3* and *Figure 4*):

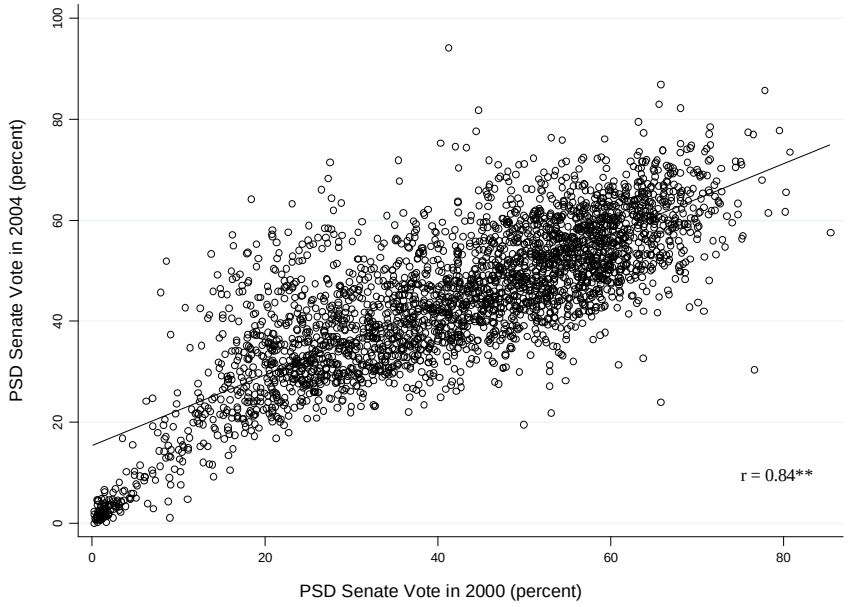

Figure 3. Locality-level PSD vote in 2004 against locality-level PSD vote in 2000 (Senate)

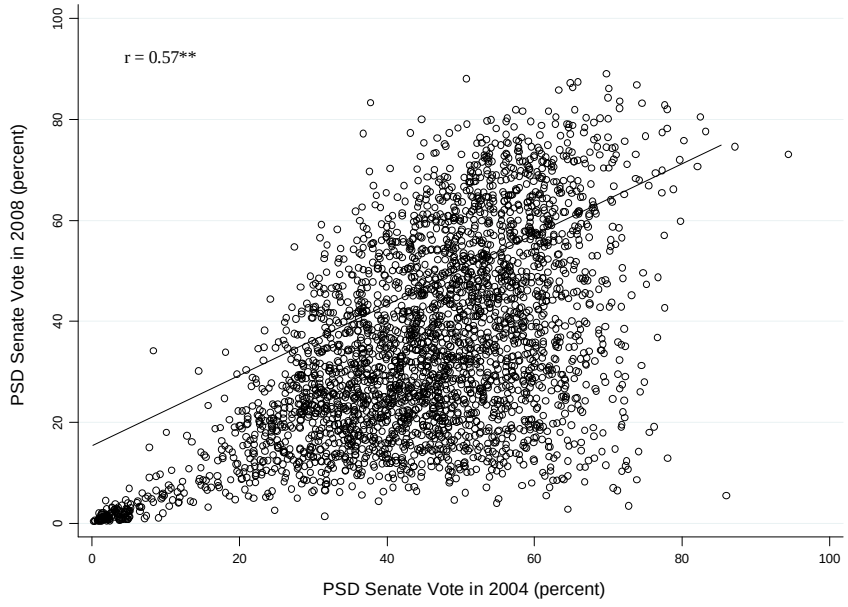

Figure 4. Locality-level PSD vote in 2008 against locality-level PSD vote in 2004 (Senate)

If we compare *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*, the first hypothesis is confirmed. The 2000 Senate vote for the PSD is a very good predictor for PSD's Senate vote in 2004 (.84 correlation), a result that is consistent with an ideological base of the vote. The 2004 Senate vote is a much poorer predictor of the 2008 Senate vote (.57 correlation), which is consistent with a shift from ideological voting to a "personalized" voting – when voting becomes largely a function of the personal qualities of the candidates, it becomes less predictable.

However, if we compare *Figure 5* and *Figure 6*, the second hypothesis is not confirmed. In *Figure 5*, we do observe a high correlation between Senate and Chamber vote in the 2004 elections, a result which is consistent with an ideological explanation of the vote (voting for the same party in both Senate and Chamber election). However, we see an equally high correlation in *Figure 6*; such a result does not indicate a vote that is less ideological in 2008 than it was in 2004. If the 2008 vote were less ideological, the personal qualities of candidates would increase or decrease the Senate and Chamber vote for the candidates of the same party, and the result will be a lower correlation than in 2004.

Thus, one result is consistent with the notion that the electoral reform did have an impact, namely, the lower correlation between the 2004 and 2008 vote, compared to the correlation between the 2000 and 2004 vote. But another result is inconsistent with such an impact – the fact that the correlation between the Chamber and the Senate vote is, in 2008, as high as it was four years before, and this latter result is more consistent with an ideological rather than "personalized" vote. It is theoretically possible to have a contagion effect, so that the vast majority of PSD's "natural" electorate who deserted it in 2008, as well as the vast majority of PSD's "unnatural" electorate who voted for the PSD in 2008, voted for the same party for both Chambers because they liked or disliked very much a certain candidate, and their vote for the other Chamber was merely a reflection of their first choice. However, we see this scenario as highly implausible.

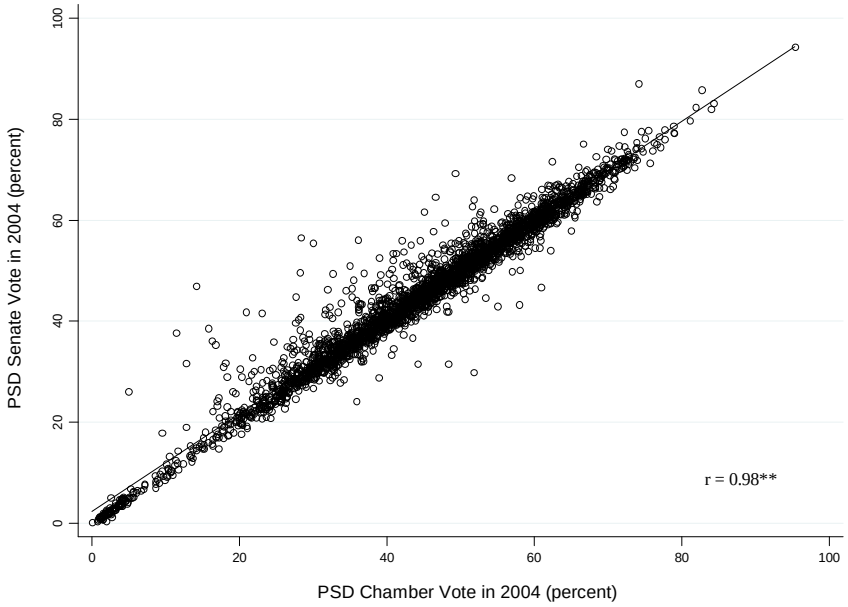

Figure 5. Locality-level PSD Senate vote against locality-level PSD Chamber vote (2004)

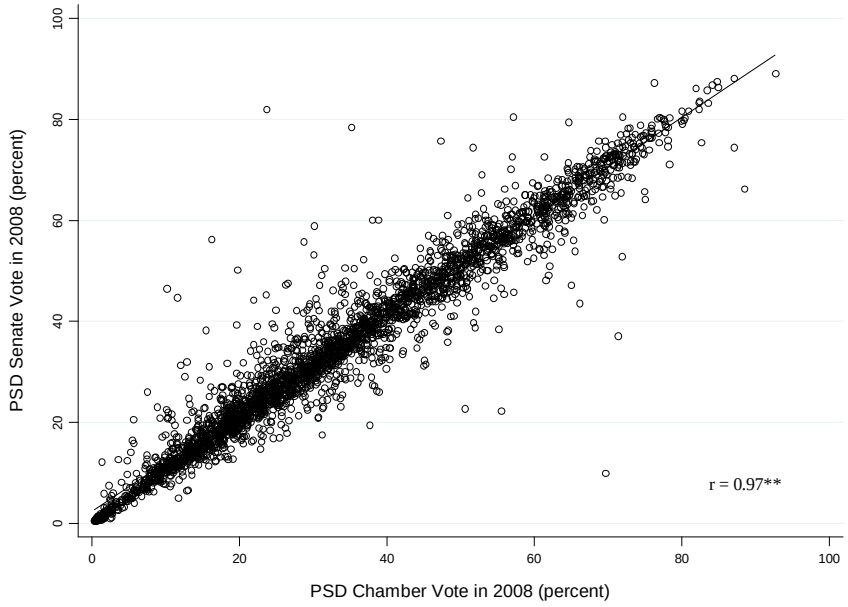

Figure 6. Locality-level PSD Senate vote against locality-level PSD Chamber vote (2008)

We think that a more plausible explanation, one that is consistent with all the results presented so far, is that the Romanian party system was, around 2008, in a process of dealignment. If that is the case, then we continue to see ideological voting to the same extent as before, as indicated by the comparison of the correlations between the Senate and the Chamber votes in 2004 and 2008. Voting continues to be partisan, so how a certain locality voted for the Chamber in a given election is still an almost perfect predictor of how it voted for the Senate in the same election (*Figure 5* and *Figure 6*). On the other hand, the process of dealignment means that the differences between more developed localities, which traditionally vote for rightist parties rather than PSD (bottom left in *Figure 3*), and lesser developed localities, which traditionally vote with the PSD (upper right in *Figure 3*), are decreasing (*Figure 4*). Therefore, a locality's vote in the previous election is not such a good predictor of its vote in the subsequent election than it used to be (*Figure 3* versus *Figure 4*).

Even though the scenario of realignment is more plausible and consistent with this analysis than an institutional explanation, the realignment argument would benefit from, and become more persuasive, if additional data would back it. We expect that a longitudinal comparison of the profile of Romania's main parties' core constituencies, using individual-level data, will reveal that these constituencies were, by 2008, far less distinctive from one another than they were in the past (in the 1990's, or even early 2000's). More specifically, if the data indicates that, throughout the 1990's and the early 2000's, the Social Democrats were clearly a party of the have-nots, this may continue to be the case by 2008, but to lesser extent than in the past, with variables such as education or income becoming poorer predictors of the choice between the left and right than in the past.

Other Parties, Additional Tests: Locality-Level Results in Parliamentary Elections, 2000-2008

Throughout the decade analyzed here (roughly, late 1990's to late 2000's), Romanian political life was dominated by five parties. The Social Democrats (PSD) were on the left and the liberals, PNL (the National Liberal Party), and the conservative PD-L (Democratic-Liberal Party, previously known as the PD, or Democratic Party) were on the right. The extreme left PRM (Greater Romania Party) promoted a mix of xenophobia, authoritarianism and nostalgia for Communism, and the UDMR has been an ethnic party representing the Hungarian minority. The PRM failed to clear the five percent threshold in 2008, thus reducing the number of parties represented in the 2008-

2012 Parliament to just four (the handful of Conservatives elected under the joint PSD-PC label represented an insignificant number).

To show that the results presented above are not an accident, we perform a more systematic test for all these parties, using the locality-level results for both the Senate and the Chamber from the last three parliamentary elections. In 2004, the PNL and the PD (PD-L) ran as an Alliance (the "DA", or "Truth and Justice" Alliance). Therefore, the only possibility to replicate the analysis for the moderate right vote was to analyze the total vote for these two parties, not just in 2004, but in 2000[19] and 2008 as well. Even though the PSD offers the clearest illustration, the results in *Figure 7* indicate that, with some caveats, the results for the other parties are consistent with our analysis and the dealignment hypothesis.

In the case of the moderate right parties, the correlation between the Chamber and the Senate vote in 2008 is as high as it was in previous elections (it is, in fact, higher than it was in 2000). This result is consistent with the dealignment scenario, but the decrease from the correlations between the 2000 and 2004 locality-level votes, for both the Senate and the Chamber, to the correlations between the 2004 and 2008 votes is negligible, unlike the sharp decline that we saw for the PSD. However, we should keep in mind the fact that, in 2000, there are four moderate parties on the right, each gaining a respectable share of the total vote. In 2004, there are only two parties on the right (PNL and PD), but they formed an alliance and presented a joint list. Finally, in 2008, the PNL and the PLD (PD) presented separate lists of candidates. Overall, is it reasonable to expect that this instability of the offer on the right has affected the demand side (i.e., the voters), thus making the patterns of regional support for the right less predictable (and consequently lowering the correlations between the vote for right in consecutive elections before the dealignment).

[19] For 2000, when the Democratic Convention 2008 (CDR 2008) and the Alliance for Romania (ApR) received rather significant shares of the total vote (in the case of the Senate, 5.3 and 4.3 percent, respectively), we included the vote for these two parties in the total. Subsequently, the Democratic Convention disintegrated, and the ApR merged with the liberals (PNL).In 2004 and 2008, only the PD/PD-L and the PNL received a substantial share of the total vote.

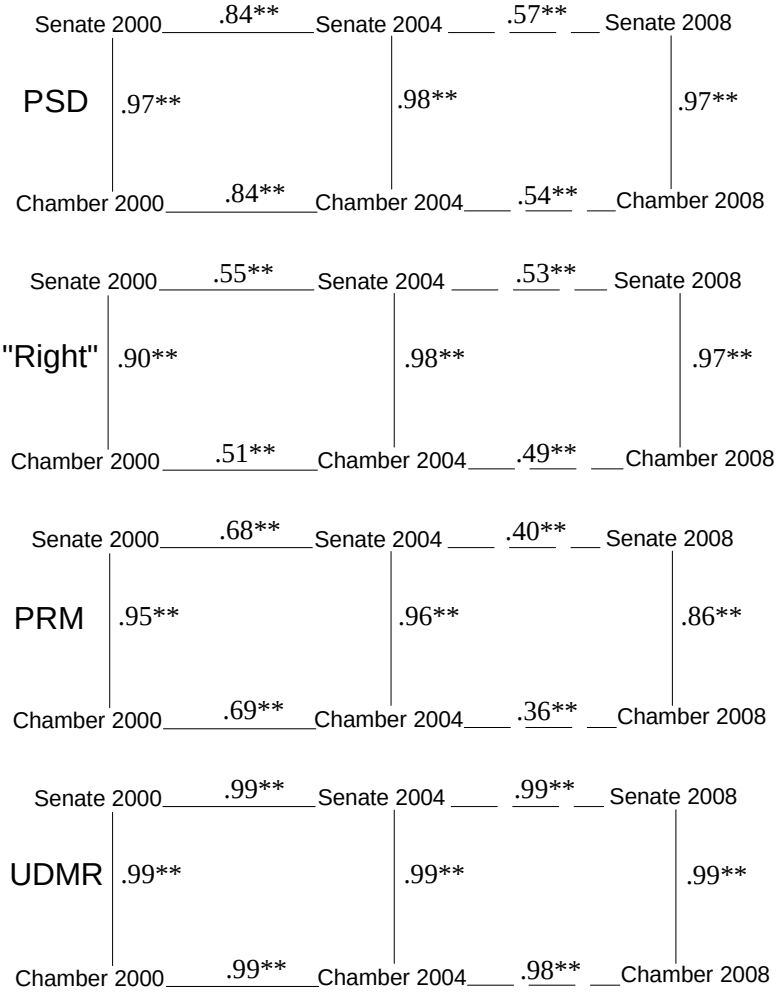

Figure 7. Bivariate correlations, major parties' vote in Romanian parliamentary elections, 2000-2008 (Senate and Chamber votes, locality-level data)

For the PRM, the results are also consistent with the dealignment hypothesis (although they can be consistent with an institutional effect as well, considering the lower correlation between the Chamber and the Senate vote in 2008). Nonetheless, taking into account the dramatic decrease of PRM's share of the vote in 2008, this lower correlation can be attributed to these low percentages across the localities and the very narrow range associated with them. Finally, the UDMR has an ethnic base, which is not affected by either the process of institutional reform, or by the dealignment process, which is restricted to "Romanian" parties, leaving the UDMR untouched.

Conclusion

The change of Romania's electoral system for parliamentary elections was promoted in order to give voters the possibility to choose candidates, rather than party lists. The underlying assumption was that, for many voters, their preferred candidate may not represent their preferred party. When that happens, personal qualities may trump ideology, and we see a shift from ideological voting to 'personalized' voting. In this paper we used aggregate (locality-level) data from the three parliamentary elections conducted in the 2000's (2000, 2004, and 2008, pre- and post-reform), to see whether this shift did in fact occur.

A first test appeared to support this hypothesis. The 2000 vote for the leftist PSD was a very good predictor of its 2004 vote. However, its 2004 vote was a much poorer predictor of its 2008 vote. If we had ideological voting in 2000 and 2004, but a mix of ideological and "personalized" voting in 2008, this could have resulted in a less predictable vote in the last parliamentary election, and thus a lower correlation between the 2004 and 2008 votes. Nonetheless, a further test appears to reject the hypothesis of "personalized" voting. In 2008, the correlation between the PSD's votes in the Senate and the Chamber elections was as high as it was in previous elections, an indication of ideological consistency (and an ideologically-driven vote for both Chambers). We argue that the most plausible explanation for these results was a process of dealignment which started after the 2004 election.

Our analysis of the results of the PSD offer the most clear illustration of an apparent effect of the electoral reform, an interpretation refuted by a further test. While these results are the clearest suggestion of a dealignment, we argue that the analysis of the results of the vote for the other major parties is also consistent with the dealignment hypothesis. What makes these latter results less clear-cut are the idiosyncrasies of the Romanian party system, with a fragmented, unstable and conflict-prone right, and an "extreme left" (PRM) that is becoming increasingly insignificant. It is possible to further test this hypothesis by using individual-level survey data. Such data will reveal whether background factors such as education, income, or urbanization, which throughout the 1990's and early 2000's used to be very good predictors of the vote, have become in the late 2000's much poorer predictors – a clear indication that the Romanian party system was indeed, by 2008, in a process of dealignment.