

Does Romania Have One Extreme Right or Two?

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What are the main partisan divisions in Romania, and what accounts for them? What is the sociological, demographic and attitudinal profile of the main constituencies in this country? These are the questions that I seek to answer. I argue that political life in post-Communist Romania was characterized until recently by the existence of three major blocs: left, right, and extreme right, and that the constituents of each of these blocs are, in one way or another, a product of modernization. The left is representing mostly rural Romania, one that has yet to modernize. The right is a product of successful modernization – an urban, young, well-educated, dynamic constituency. The extreme right constituency, the voters of Greater Romania Party (PRM), emerged after the transition from the prior regime as the side effect of a kind of “defective modernity,” the process of rapid urbanization and industrialization imposed from above during Communism. As new generations of voters come of age, voters who were socialized under very different conditions from previous generations, conditions became ripe for the emergence of a new extreme right party – the Party of the New Generation (PNG).

In order to understand these partisan divisions we must think of political competition in Romania (and Eastern Europe more generally) as two-dimensional, with an “old politics” or economic dimension and a “new politics” or Gal (Green/alternative/libertarian) versus Tan (traditional/authoritarian/nationalist) dimension, orthogonal to the first. Unlike in Western Europe, where the mainstream left is more libertarian socially than the mainstream right, in Eastern Europe the situation is reversed. Thus, we should not be too surprised to find the left and extreme right constituencies adjacent to one another in a policy space; moreover, some extreme right parties like Greater Romania and its

constituents are rather leftist on economic issues, which raises the question whether the “extreme right” label is appropriate for such a party, which perhaps should be more appropriately called “welfare chauvinist.” To substantiate these claims, I use survey data from the early 1990s up to 2006 to describe the sociological and ideological profile of the constituents of each major ideological bloc – left, right, and “extreme right”, and make comparisons not only across blocs, but also within them, comparing the electorates of the PRM and the PNG. I also discuss how all this relates to party competition in Romania.

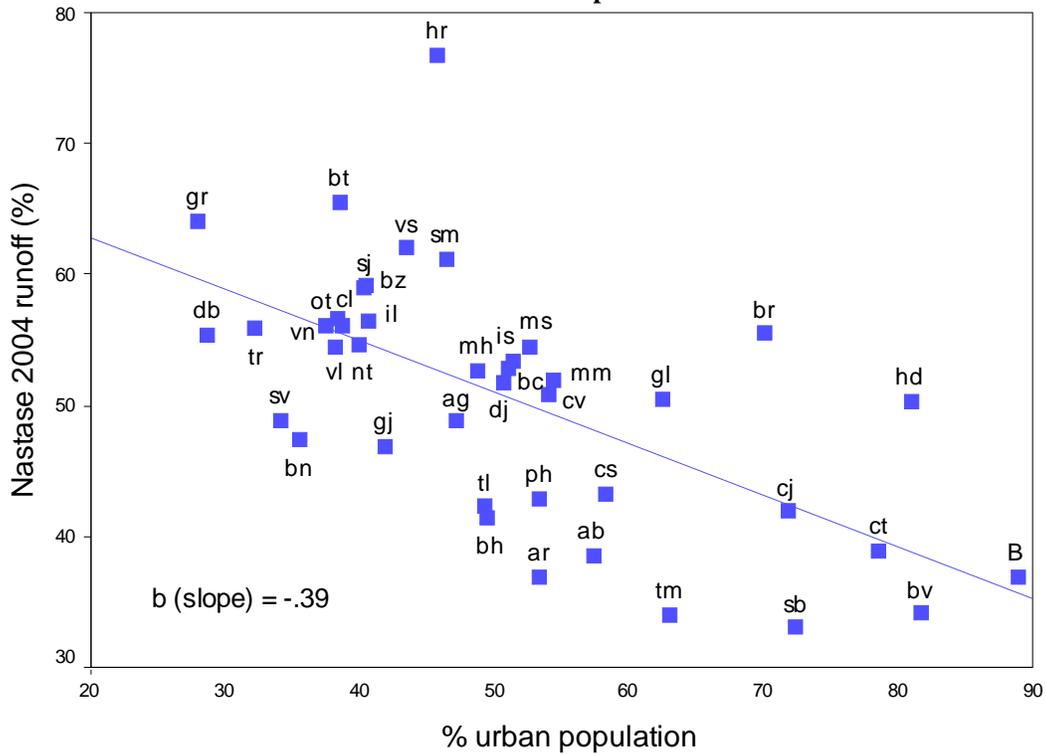
Romania’s Three Modernizations & Political Consequences

As in the Soviet Union, Romanian Communism was a process of rapid, forced modernization from above (Moore 1966). In spite of all the efforts of the regime, urban population became a majority in Romania only in the late 1980s. Currently, almost half of Romania’s population continues to live in villages. Moreover, the manifest urban bias of the Communist regime’s policies has led to a perpetuation of massive urban/rural disparities. Cities offered better jobs, subsidized housing, better services and education; agriculture was permanently sacrificed in favor of industry (Masson 1985, 258-62). Life in Romanian villages continues to be dominated by a “culture of survival” (Mungiu 2002, 21), and statistics indicate a chasm between urban and rural. As of 2000, 88 percent of urban population had access to running water; in rural areas, the figure was only 14 percent (UNDP 2003, 255).

The aforementioned factors have important political consequences. If the partisanship of rural voters differs from those of urban voters, then the electoral support for major parties will differ not only at the micro level (as a function of individual characteristics), but also

at the macro level, and we will have some parties with a predominantly urban base and other parties with a predominantly rural base. Taking into account Romania’s large rural population, it means that a party can be successful even when it relies primarily on the rural vote, as the Party of Social Democracy (PSD/PDSR/FDSN) did since 1990:

Figure 1. Urbanization and support for left, second round of the 2004 presidential election



This situation was acknowledged by the former leader of the PSD, Adrian Năstase. After losing the second round of the last presidential election, he talked about “two Romanias”: an older, poorer, predominantly rural Romania, who voted for him, and a younger, richer, urban and dynamic Romania, who supported Traian Băsescu, the candidate of the moderate right. This is the Romanian version of Lipset’s (1960) democratic class struggle between the haves and have-nots. The data in Table 1 indicates a strong, negative, and continuous impact of various indicators of regional development (urbanization,

education, access to running water) on support for leftist candidates and the PSD in all elections since 1990:

Table 1. Regional development and vote for left in Romania: Presidential and parliamentary elections, 1990-2004 (41 counties/judete)

	Left 1992	Left 1996	Left 2000	Left 2004	Agriculture	Urbanization	Education	No water
Left 1990	.94**	.91**	.92**	.89**	.43**	-.34*	-.65**	.58**
Left 1992		.97**	.98**	.90**	.45**	-.38*	-.68**	.63**
Left 1996			.97**	.91**	.55**	-.46**	-.75**	.70**
Left 2000				.91**	.46**	-.38*	-.69**	.63**
Left 2004					.61**	-.49**	-.78**	.71**
Agriculture						-.84**	-.83**	.87**
Urbanization							.71**	-.91**
Education								-.85**

Thus, the left/right cleavage has an economic base, with a left (PSD) representing the most disadvantaged segment of society, the same group characterized by Inkeles and Bauer (in the Soviet context) as the lumpenproletariat of the Communist society (1959, 71); on the other hand, the right (PD and PNL) represent the middle class. The third bloc, the voters of the extreme right, is to a greater extent than the left and right constituencies a creation of transition. The left and the right represent the objective socioeconomic position and interests of their constituents; the radicalism of extreme right voters is rather the expression of a *relative* marginalization. If we follow the former regime’s classification of the active population into peasants, industrial workers and “intellectuals,” it is clear that the second group were the main beneficiaries of Communism. After 1989, they became the main victims of a transition whose result was the breaking of the “social contract” between the former regime and the society (Crowley

1994, 592). Even though in objective terms industrial urban workers were still better off than peasants, the more important thing here is the subjective distance between what people expect and what they get in actuality. According to Bahry, “the meaning of ‘social injustice’ [after the transition] seems to have shifted from absolute to relative deprivation” (1993, 537).

If that is the case, according to relative deprivation theory, we should not expect the peasantry, preoccupied with physical survival, to be the most radical group (Davies 1962, 7). Rather, it is the working class, those who saw a rapidly developing gap between what they expected and what they got. The data in Table 2 lends support to this hypothesis, showing that, while development is negatively correlated with the vote for left, it is uncorrelated with support for the extreme right:

Table 2. Urbanization, ethnic composition, region, and support for left, right and extreme right in the first round of the 2004 presidential election

	Năstase 2004	Băseșcu 2004	Tudor 2004	Tudor 2000
Urbanization	- 0.27*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.01 (0.04)	- 0.05 (0.05)
Hungarians	- 0.34*** (0.05)	- 0.32*** (0.05)	- 0.12** (0.04)	- 0.38*** (0.05)
Transylvania	- 5.3* (2.1)	5.0* (2.1)	- 0.5 (1.5)	9.0*** (1.9)
Adjusted R ²	0.80	0.64	0.31	0.61

I should point out the fact that, while my explanation for the profile of the left and right constituencies is rather static, the one for the voters of the extreme right is more dynamic. For the first two groups, free and fair elections were an opportunity to express policy

preferences that were already into place. At the same time, the preferences of extreme right-wing voters are largely a creation of the transition process. That being the case, the consequence is that, as the time goes by, we can expect changes in the profile of the constituency of the existing extreme right party, and the emergence of a new right-wing party – and this is indeed what we are witnessing in recent years.

The group of nostalgics of Communism (the natural constituency of the PRM) is shrinking, and getting older, and the current economic and social conditions differ substantially from those of the past. The socialization process is also different from what it used to be before 1989. The result of all this is that the interests and values of new generations are changing, and so is the electorate of the extreme right – young voters with vocational training are now merely cynical about politics, rather than longing for an epoch that they have no recollection of. In the following section I analyze survey data to back these claims, offering a description of the profile of Romanian partisan constituencies, in particular the extreme right (PRM and PNG).

Romanian partisan constituencies: sociological and ideological profile

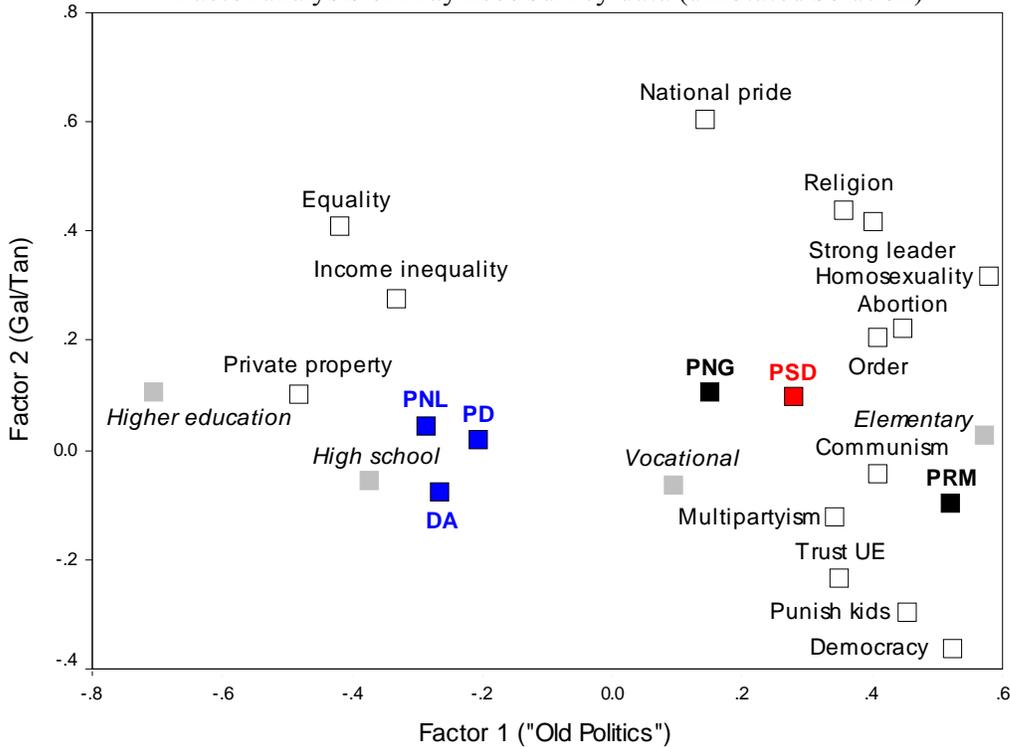
As the data in Table 3 indicates, the profile of the left and right constituencies did not change much since 1989. However, the electorate of Greater Romania has aged considerably, and the young age of the Party of the New Generation suggests that the kind of voters who, in the early 1990s, voted for the PRM, now are supporting the PNG.

Table 3. Median age of liberal, socialist and extreme right electorates in Romania, 1993-2006

	Liberals (PNL)	Socialists (PSD)	Extreme Right (PRM)	Extreme Right (PUNR/PNG)
1993	36	54	37	49 (PUNR)
2000	37	47	39	43 (PUNR)
2006	37	51	51	33 (PNG)

What about the policy positions endorsed by these various constituencies? In Figure 2 I used factor analysis of survey data (the May 2006 wave of the Soros Barometer of Public Opinion), to map the positions of Romanian respondents on a variety of economic and non-economic policies. As the figure indicates, non-economic issues (evaluations of Communism and democracy, trust in the European Union, or attitudes toward homosexuals) are as important as economic issues (opinions about inequality or private property) in structuring the attitudes of Romanian voters and differentiating between various constituencies. As we can see, the competitive space is anchored by moderate right constituencies at one end, and the constituents of the “extreme right” Greater Romania Party, at the other, with the constituents of the left-wing PSD and the extreme right PNG in an intermediate position.

Figure 2. Two-dimensional policy mapping of partisan constituencies in Romania
Factor analysis of May 2006 survey data (unrotated solution)



Another thing that becomes immediately apparent is the impact of education, with people with higher education being the most reformist group and people with elementary education being the least reformist group. Of course, this is not surprising, but maybe the magnitude of these differences is, and it does suggest that we should expect them to be reflected in large differences between partisan support across these groups.

Partisan Divisions and Electoral Competition in Romania

The last issue I will address is how these divisions at the level of the electorate translate into and affect partisan competition. When partisan choice is not constrained, as it happens in legislative elections or the first round of presidential elections, the answer is straightforward: each voter will cast a vote in favor of his or her preferred party or candidate. The more interesting question, though, is how well we can predict the transfer

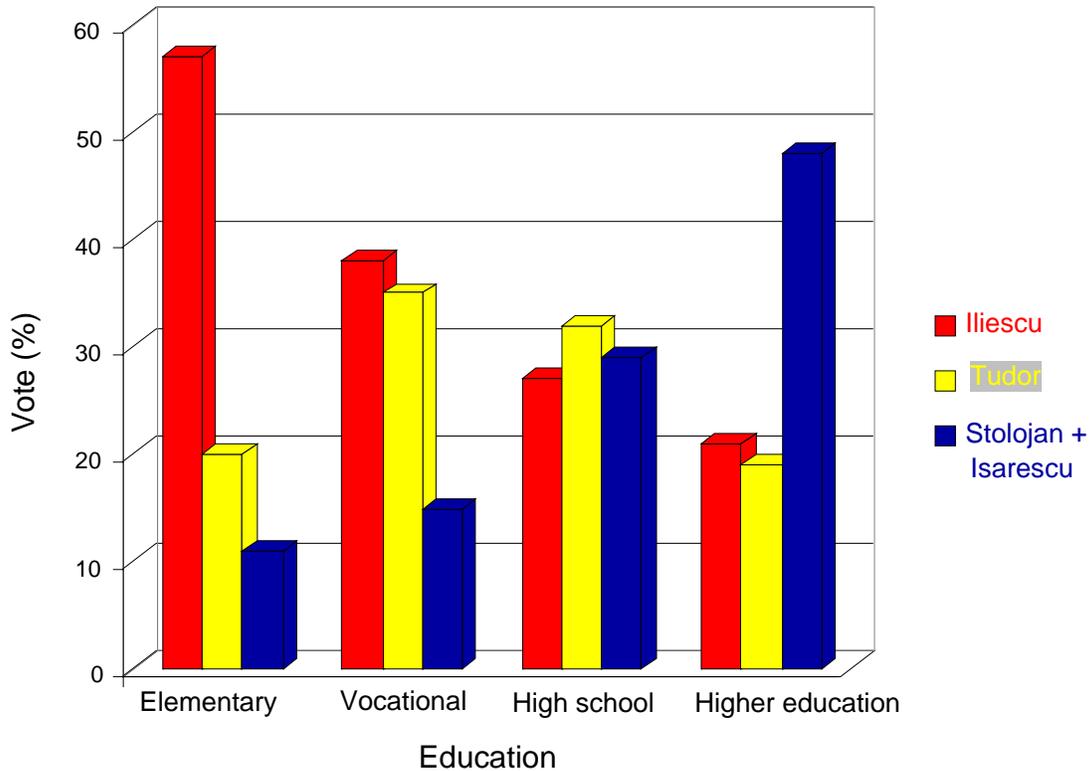
of votes from the first to the second round in presidential elections. What we have here is the setting for a natural experiment:

Table 4. County-level electoral support for the candidate of the left in the first and second round of presidential elections (1996, 2000 and 2004), as a function of regional development, ethnic structure and region

	<i>Iliescu 1996-1</i>	<i>Iliescu 1996-2</i>	<i>Iliescu 2000-1</i>	<i>Iliescu 2000-2</i>	<i>Năstase 2004-1</i>	<i>Năstase 2004-2</i>
Workforce in agriculture (%)	+ 0,33***	+ 0,34***	+ 0,29***	- 0,04	+ 0,38***	+ 0,42***
Hungarians (%)	- 0,23***	- 0,35***	- 0,26***	+ 0,44***	- 0,31***	+ 0,30***
Transylvania	- 14,6***	- 14,1***	- 16,4***	- 16,4***	- 5,5**	- 9,0**
Adjusted R ²	0,87	0,87	0,90	0,68	0,87	0,66

As we can see, with the notable exception of the second round of the 2000 presidential election, development had a strong, negative impact on aggregate support for left. But these are results from the aggregate level; what happened at the individual level?

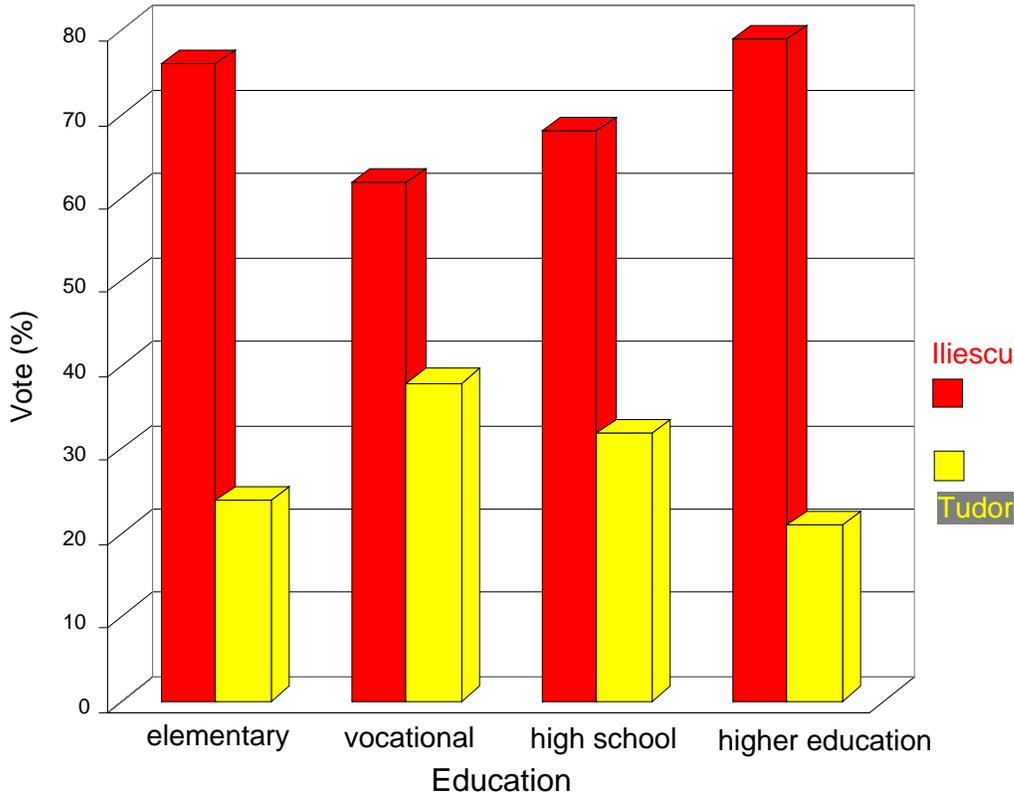
Figure 3. Education and vote, first round of 2000 presidential elections (IMAS exit poll)



There are at least two different interpretations of these results, both of them plausible, but mutually exclusive. The first interpretation is that, unlike it was the case in the first round, when voter choice for any of the three major blocs was clearly structured by socioeconomic status or class (see Figure 3, where I used education as a proxy for it), in the second round voters saw little or no difference between the two remaining candidates, so education had no impact on voter’s choice. The absence of any effect at the individual

level translates into an absence of an effect at the aggregate level. However, exit poll data tells a different story (Figure 4):

Figure 4. Education and vote, second round of the 2000 presidential election (IMAS)



As we can see, education did have an important effect on the vote in the 2000 presidential runoff, but this effect was non-linear. It was due to the unusual alliance between “haves” (people with the highest amount of education, the natural constituency of the right) and “have-nots” (people with the lowest educational attainment, the natural constituency of the left). In the aggregate, we see no effect.

In a typical presidential runoff (1992, 1996 or 2004), we have a confrontation between a moderate left and a moderate right candidate, and the results indicate voters’ preferences along the first, socioeconomic or “old politics” dimension. When an extreme right-wing

party candidate is present in the runoff, this activates the second, Gal/Tan dimension. The 2000 presidential runoff was, for an important number of voters, a choice between democracy and dictatorship. This example shows that, while relatively stable, electoral alignments and partisan alliances in Romania are not set in stone, and unusual circumstances like those of the 2000 presidential election can lead to unusual alliances. Moreover, the emergence of the Party of the New Generation, on the one hand, and the opposing views that the leaders of the PNG and the PRM have about Communism, on the other, is but one of the factors that are quite likely to prevent any alliance between parties that should otherwise be natural allies.

Conclusion

In this paper I presented a structural explanation for the emergence of left, right, and extreme right constituencies in Romania, and argued that each of these constituencies was, in some way, created by modernization. Moreover, from such a perspective the emergence of another new right-wing party, the Party of the New Generation, is not surprising. I analyzed survey data which portrayed distinctive sociological and ideological profiles for each of the three (currently, four) constituencies, and discussed how these differences affect party competition.

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