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Project: *Assessing the personalization of voting behaviour in post-communist polities: under what circumstances do leaders matter more?*

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INTERMEDIATE SCIENTIFIC REPORT

On the implementation of the project between May 2013 and December 2014

Description and objectives

The research project "*Assessing the personalization of voting behaviour in post-communist polities: under what circumstances do leaders matter more?*" aims at investigating *the magnitude and sources of variation in leader effects in the particular context of new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)*. A longitudinal and comparative perspective is to be employed. Largely ignored in the literature on the personalization of electoral politics, CEE countries offer a particularly challenging context for the study of leader effects, given: (a) the absence of strong and stable party loyalties, rather fluid party systems, low ideological involvement, and high volatility rates; (b) the fast development of private media systems, subject to rapid tabloidization, mainly due to commercial constraints; (c) electorates with low political sophistication levels, facing an increased complexity of political issues they have to deal with and looking for shortcuts out of it, converting directly from 'subjects' to 'citizens'; (d) rather similar options in terms of political system and electoral system; (e) a tradition of almighty leaders, boosted by the communist totalitarian (or even sultanistic) experience. This particular mixture of conditions is likely to cultivate different leadership arrangements compared to Western polities, but still resulting into the same overall outcome of personalization of electoral politics. Two core directions are to be investigated: (1) the magnitude and evolution of leader effects on party vote in CEE countries during the post-communist period; (2) the variations in leader effects in relation to voter, leader, party and system characteristics, but also to campaign context.

Within the framework of this general objective, several specific research objectives are to be differentiated: (O1) to devise a region-specific theoretical and conceptual framework of analysis for the personalization of electoral politics in CEE post-communist countries; (O2) to assess the magnitude and evolution of leader effects on party vote in CEE countries during the transition and democratization period; (O3) to assess the variations in the magnitude of leader effects that are due to individual factors (both voter characteristics and leader characteristics), to party-related factors, and to system-specific factors; (O4) to investigate the mechanisms by which campaign discourse activates candidate-specific personality traits that become salient for an electoral race.

The work plan of the project is divided into seven work packages: (WP1) Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the project; (WP2) Documents analysis; (WP3) Data preparation for longitudinal statistical analysis; (WP4) Statistical analysis of large-scale data; (WP5) Data collection for qualitative analysis; (WP6) Analysis of focus group and media analysis data; (WP7) Dissemination of project's results, reports, and networking.

Activities scheduled for the period May 2013-December 2014 are included in work packages WP1 to 5 and WP7. **All activities have been fulfilled according to the plan** in the project proposal and Appendix 4, under optimal conditions, both in terms of time and financial management. The following section is dedicated to the main developments in the implementation of the project on each of the working packages scheduled.

Main developments in the implementation of the project

(WP1) Theoretical and methodological substantiation of the project

This working package is structured along two dimensions: a theoretical one and a methodological one.

The first dimension is related to an extensive process of *theoretical documentation*, namely identifying, reading, and integrating the newest literature on the core concept of personalization of politics and its electoral dimension, on the conditions that mediate the manifestation of leader effects (individual factors, party-related factors, and system-specific factors), on the core actors (parties and leaders) and electoral contexts in several CEE post-communist countries, and on how media and discourse activate the perception of leader personal traits. For this purpose, I mainly made use of the documentation resources provided by two institutions: (a) Lucian

Blaga University of Sibiu, the host institution (library and access to electronic collections of academic journals provided within the framework of the ANELIS-plus project) and (b) Central European University in Budapest (library and electronic resources, feedback from academic staff), where I took a documentation stage between October 28 and November 28, 2013.

On a first direction of theoretical documentation, my efforts focused on identifying and reading the most up-to-date literature on *leader effects and the conditions mediating the manifestation of leader effects*, acting as stimuli or inhibitors¹. First, the documentation efforts were focused on empirical analyses investigating the *impact of voter characteristics on the personalization of voting decision*: political involvement (Gidengil 2011; Lachat 2009; Lobo 2010), political sophistication (Catellani and Alberici 2012; Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2013; Gidengil 2011; Pierce 1993), party identification (Bittner 2011; Dinas 2008; Garzia 2013a; Gidengil 2011; Lobo 2010; Schoen 2007), ideological position (Bittner 2011; Catellani and Alberici 2012; Garzia 2013a), media consumption (Gidengil 2011; Elmelund-Præstæker and Hopmann 2012; Hayes 2009; Lenz and Lawson 2011; Mendelsohn 1994, 1996), time of voting decision (Catellani and Alberici 2012), religiousness (Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2013; Dinas 2008; Garzia 2013a, 2013b), social class (Bellucci, Garzia, and Lewis-Beck 2013; Garzia 2013a), risk orientation (Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley 2013). A second target of focus was the literature on *how personal characteristics of leaders (genuine or perceived) do stimulate or inhibit the personalization of voting decision*: personality traits – competence, integrity, leadership, empathy, charisma (Bittner 2011; Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Colton 2000; Jenssen and Aalberg 2006; Johnston 2002; Kinder 1986; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2010; Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk 1986), incumbency (Barisione 2009; Catellani and Alberici 2012), experience (Hayes 2009; Nadeau and Nevitte 2011), age and gender (Denemark, Ward, and Bean 2012; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2010; Nadeau and Nevitte 2011). Third, the newest literature on *the effects of party characteristics on the magnitude of leader effects* was covered, namely: the influence of the ideological family (Aardal and Binder 2011; Lobo 2008), organisational structure (Aardal and Binder 2011; Lobo 2008), incumbency (Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Semetko 1996), party size (Aardal and Binder 2011; Curtice and Blais 2001), and party age (Aardal and Binder 2011). The last category of constraints on the level of personalization explored in the literature was that of *systemic characteristics*: party system (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Curtice and Hunjan 2011), electoral system (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Curtice and Hunjan 2011; Karvonen 2010), political system (Curtice and Hunjan 2011), type of election (Barisione 2009), and degree of polarisation within the political

¹ Selective bibliographic references, they do not reflect the entire body of literature explored.

system (Barisione 2009). On this first direction, most of the documentation efforts were scheduled in 2013.

On a second direction of theoretical documentation, the project focused on studying *the core actors (parties and leaders) and the contexts for a series of CEE countries/elections* for which survey data containing the needed personalization items are available: Belarus 2008; Croatia 2009; Czech Republic 1996, 2006, 2010; Estonia 2011; Hungary 1998; Latvia 2010; Montenegro 2012; Poland 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007; Romania 1996, 2004, 2012; Russia 1999; Serbia 2012; Slovakia 2010; Slovenia 1996, 2008; Ukraine 1998. For this purpose, the library stage at the Central European University in Budapest and the support of the Political Science Department of the same university were particularly helpful. This second direction of documentation was quasi-entirely covered in 2013.

The methodological dimension of the project substantiation was scheduled for 2014. It involved an effort to extend my skills of statistical analysis, by learning to do and interpret multilevel modelling with STATA 13 (an academic license for the SE version of the software was acquired within the project's budget for 2013). In order to achieve this goal, I registered to the course of 'Multilevel modelling' of the Summer School in Survey Methodology organised by the Research and Expertise Centre for Survey Methodology (RECSM) of University Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona. The course took place between July 9 and 11, 2014 and was taught by Professor Leonardo Grilli (University of Florence). It offered an introduction to this analysis technique, covering the most important issues needed for my research: multilevel linear models (hierarchical structures; no covariates case; a single covariate at level 1 case; a covariate at level 2 case; between, within and contextual effects; fixed effects and random effects) and basic multilevel logistic models (standard models for binary responses, random effects models for binary responses).

(WP2) Documents analysis

This working package involves an extensive analysis and standardization of the information on leaders, parties, and political contexts for the CEE countries/elections for which survey data containing the needed personalization items are available. Applied on the documents collected during WP1 and additional sources, the result of WP2 combined with WP3 is the insertion of leader-level, party-level, and context-related variables into the individual-level databases. As previously mentioned, the activities are closely linked to those included in WP3, being scheduled for 2013 and 2014.

By the end of 2013, the leader/party/context-level information has been coded for the election surveys in CEE countries included in Module 3 of the *Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems* (CSES), namely: Czech Republic 2006, 2010; Croatia 2007; Estonia 2011; Latvia 2010; Poland 2005, 2007; Slovakia 2010 and Slovenia 2008.

During 2014, the information has been coded for the remaining election studies in CSES Modules 1 and 4 and the additional studies including the needed personalization items: Czech Republic 1996; Hungary 1998; Montenegro 2012; Poland 1997, 2001; Romania 1996, 2004, 2012; Russia 1999; Serbia 2012; Slovenia 1996; Ukraine 1998. More information on the employed variables can be found on the website of the project.

(WP3) Data preparation for longitudinal statistical analyses

The working package is dedicated to the transformations in individual-level data and to their aggregation with the leader/party/context-level data collected in WP2.

Individual-level data have been subjects to extensive transformations for several main reasons. First, *data coming from election studies outside the CSES Modules 1, 3, and 4 were recoded and adapted to the structure of the CSES items*. Unfortunately, in many cases, the significant differences made those data unusable. Second, *similar but not identical items from various modules of CSES were subject to intensive recoding in order to be prepared for an aggregated overall database for CEE countries*. Particularly difficult tasks involved items of retrospective government activity evaluation and education. Third, *CEE election studies from CSES Modules 1, 3, and 4 and the additional individual-level databases were aggregated in a unique database*. Intensive cross-checks for possible mistakes were needed. The first category of transformations were started in 2013 and finished in the first half of 2014. The second and the third categories of transformations were implemented in 2014.

Additionally, *leader/party/context-level data collected in WP2 need to be aggregated with the individual-level data*. The aggregation of party data and context data with the individual-level data ended in early October 2014. An intermediate view on the variable employed can be found in the description of the statistical models on the website of the project. The aggregation of leader-level data is to be implemented in early December 2014.

(WP4) Statistical analysis of large-scale data

Three categories of statistical models are to be designed, tested, and run as part of this working package: (1) a model testing the impact of *voter characteristics* on leader

effects; (2) a model testing the impact of *party characteristics* on leader effects; (3) a model testing the impact of *leader characteristics* on the magnitude of personalization.

The first model has been developed in the first months of 2014. Test analyses were run and presented in the context of two international conferences (Iași, May 2014, International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society; Rome, July 2014, 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology) in order to receive extensive feed-back. The final model is run as a series of logistic regression models predicting the party vote. The core independent variable is the leader liking score, while the moderation effect of voter characteristics is treated as statistical interaction term (product term of leader evaluation and voter characteristic). Voter characteristics tested in successive regression models are: political knowledge (0-10), subjective political information (0=not informed, 1=somehow/very informed), time of voting decision (0=early decider, 1=late decider), party identification (0=non-identifier, 1=somehow close/very close), interest in politics (1-4). Controls are introduced for: gender, age, education, region, left-right, and government retrospective evaluation. Extensive models are run for the Romanian election studies, more limited models (less voter characteristics available) are run for the entire CEE countries database. The analytical strategies involve: the Δ Pseudo R^2 strategy for estimating the magnitude of leader effects; the $\Delta\chi^2$ strategy and analysis of statistically significant $\exp(b)$'s for testing if interaction terms bring a significant contribution to the explanation of vote choice (in other words, the particular voter characteristic has a significant impact on leader effects); $\exp(b)$'s, multiplicative factors, and Johnson-Neyman method (using PROCESS by Andrew Hayes) for explaining the influence of individual moderators on leader effects.

The second model has been developed between September and November 2014 together with Professor Mircea Comșa from the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca. Test analyses have been run and results have been presented in the context of two international conferences (Gdańsk, October 2014, European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36 Midterm Conference; Warsaw, November 2014, Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?') in order to receive extensive feed-back. The final model is run as a series of successive multilevel mixed effects logistic regressions (QR decomposition) on a pooled stacked dataset of 100,960 cases for 76 parties across 18 legislative elections in CEE countries. The dependent variable is party vote. The core independent variable is the leader liking score, while the moderation effect of each party characteristic is treated as a statistical interaction term (product term of leader evaluation and party characteristic). Party characteristics tested in successive regression models are: party size (percent of seats in the Parliament before election), party age (years), incumbency (in office, opposition), incumbency visibility (percent of executive portfolios before election),

ideology (ideological family and left-right positions provided by experts). Controls on level 1 are introduced for: age, higher education, less than secondary education, union membership, household income, government retrospective evaluation, left-right self-positioning, and party identification. Controls on level 2 are introduced for: country and election. The analytical strategy involves the assessment of exp(b)'s for the interaction terms across successive models/successive party characteristics considered.

The third model is still under development and is expected to be finished in the second half of December 2014. The analytical strategy is similar to the one employed in the second model. Leader characteristics considered on the aggregate CEE election studies database are the following: gender, age, time in office, incumbency.

(WP5) Data collection – qualitative analysis

As a result of the project evaluators' recommendation, the qualitative research working packages (both WP5 and WP6) target the 2014 Presidential elections in Romania. WP5 has two components: gathering of focus group data and gathering of media content data.

On the first component, a series of focus groups were run in the pre-election period focusing on *the perceived personal traits of the main candidates and their salience*. Working with a lightly structured interview guide developed in the context of the specific list of the main presidential candidates, focus groups also targeted the perceived contrasts between candidate perceived profiles and the role of media.

On the second component, *first page journal articles during the electoral campaign on the most salient five candidates* have been archived for future analyses on how media frames leader personal traits. The journals considered are the following: *Adevărul, Evenimentul zilei, România liberă, Jurnalul național*. In addition to that, the *core content of websites of the main presidential candidates (Klaus Iohannis, Victor Ponta, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, Elena Udrea, and Monica Macovei)* has been archived for further analyses: electoral manifestos, promotional material, press releases, interviews, etc.

All these activities have been put into practice during October-November 2014.

(WP6) Analysis of focus group and media analysis data

The entire working package is scheduled for 2015 and did not involve any activity during 2013 and 2014.

(WP7) *Dissemination of project's results, reports, and networking*

This working package is continuous over the entire period of the project. There are four main pillars of dissemination considered in the initial project: website, conference presentations, submission of research articles supported through the CNCS/UEFISCDI research grant, and reports.

The *website of the research project* was launched at the beginning of the project (2013) and is hosted on the institutional page of the principal investigator: <http://web.ulbsibiu.ro/andrei.gheorghita/pnii-ru-pd-2012-3-567.html>. Designed in English, it presents the main coordinates of the research project, the evolutions in its implementation, and the main outputs. It was continuously updated during the implementation of the project (2013-2014).

Within the time frame May 2013-December 2014, *9 conference presentations* benefitted from the support of the research grant:

2014	<i>'Voter characteristics and the personalization of electoral behaviour in Romania'</i> , paper presented at the 2014 International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society, Iași, May 9-10, 2014. (EN)
	<i>'The personalization of electoral decision and voter characteristics in a post-communist context'</i> , paper presented at the 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology, Rome, July 4-7, 2014. (EN)
	<i>'Election studies in Romania: where are we now?'</i> , presentation at the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Plenary Meeting in Berlin, October 8-11, 2014. (EN)
	<i>'Party characteristics and leader effects in post-communist polities'</i> (co-author Mircea Comșa), paper presented at the European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36 Midterm Conference '25 Years after the Communism: East and West of Europe in Search of Solidarity', Gdansk, October 16-18, 2014. (EN)
	<i>'Personalization of electoral politics and party characteristics in Central and Eastern European democracies'</i> (co-author Mircea Comșa), paper presented at the Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?', Warsaw, November 7-8, 2014. (EN)
2013	<i>'Caracteristicile liderilor politici și personalizarea politicii electorale în România postcomunistă'</i> , paper presented at the 2013 Annual Conference of the Society of Romanian Sociologists, Iași, May 16-18, 2013. (RO)
	<i>'Social solidarity in distorted times: Unfolding the Romanian case'</i> (co-author Horațiu Rusu), paper presented at the 11th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Turin, August 28-31, 2013. (EN)
	<i>'Caracteristicile personale ale liderilor politici și impactul acestora asupra</i>

	<i>deciziei de vot: cazul României'</i> , paper presented at the Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work, Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013. (RO)
	<i>'Public spending and social solidarity'</i> (co-author Horațiu Rusu), paper presented at the Annual Conference of Research in Sociology and Social Work, Sibiu, October 11-12, 2013. (EN)

In terms of academic articles, 2 research articles supported from the research grant have been submitted to ISI journals until the end of November 2014: 1 in 2013 and 1 in 2014. The article submitted in 2013 (*Slovak Sociological Review*) has been published in the June 2014 issue of the journal. A second article was submitted in March 2014 () and was accepted for publication in September 2014.

Title	Journal	Status
<i>Transnational solidarity and public support for the EU enlargement</i> (co-author Horațiu Rusu) Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-RU-PD-2011-3-0132, PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0210, PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669	<i>Sociologia - Slovak Sociological Review</i> 46(3): 261-282. ISI 2013 impact factor=0,212	<i>Published</i> June 2014 <i>Accepted</i> November 2013 <i>Submitted</i> August 2013
<i>'Many', 'half' or 'one out of two'? Assessing the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in reducing self-reported turnout</i> (co-author Mircea Comșa) Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669, PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567, IDEI-PCE-2174/2009	<i>Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială</i> ISI 2013 impact factor=1,141	<i>Accepted</i> September 2014 <i>Submitted</i> March 2014

A third ISI journal article is planned to be submitted to the **XXXXXXXX-Anonymized to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX** in December 2014. The pre-submission version of the article before can be accessed on the project's website (link is not public): **XXXXXXXX-Anonymized to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX**.

Title	Journal	Status
XXXXXXXX-Anonymized to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX Acknowledgement to projects: PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3-0567 and PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0669	XXXXXXXX-Anonymized to avoid interfering with the reviewing process -XXXXXXXX	<i>Submission</i> December 2014

A review of one of the most seminal books in the literature on the topic of the project (Kees Aarts, André Blais, and Hermann Schmitt, eds. 2011. *Political Leaders and Democratic Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.) has been published in *Social Change Review* 11(2), December 2013 (indexed EBSCO, CEEOL, Index Copernicus, RePEc, De Gruyter Open). Although part of the project dissemination, the book review does not hold a specific acknowledgement to the project due to its specificity (book review, not research article):

Title	Journal	Status
Book review: Kees Aarts, André Blais, and Hermann Schmitt (eds.), <i>Political Leaders and Democratic Elections</i> .	<i>Social Change Review</i> 11 (2): 153-155.	Published December 2013

Finally, intermediate *scientific reports* have been submitted in December 2013 and December 2014 and are published on the website of the project.

Research findings

At the moment of this intermediate research report (December 2014), particularly interesting results were developed in relation to the impact of *voter individual characteristics and party characteristics* on the magnitude of leader effects in legislative elections (the first two categories of models). A brief summary of the main findings is presented in the following paragraphs.

In relation to *party characteristics*, the impact of party size, party age, incumbency, and ideology was tested on an aggregate database of 18 legislative elections in CEE countries, for 72 parties/leaders, and 100,960 cases. *Party size* and *left-right ideological positioning* appear to have no significant effect on the relevance of leaders for the results of elections. *Party age* does moderate the manifestation of leader effects: vote for more ‘mature’ parties appears to be more personalized than for newer ones. *Incumbency* stimulates a leader-centred electoral decision: holding executive positions comes with higher leader effects for the party. In coalition governments, stronger parties benefit more from their leaders than smaller coalition partners. *Ideological family of the party* appears to be related to different patterns of personalization in CEE polities: while conservative, liberal, and communist parties transfer a lot from their leaders’ popularity/lack of popularity, leaders are less important in the eyes of the voters of social democrat, national, and agrarian parties. These preliminary findings have been addressed to the scientific community in the context of two international conferences (Gdansk, October 2014, European Sociological Association (ESA) RN36

Midterm Conference; Warsaw, November 2014, Conference 'What's next for democratic capitalism?') and raised extensive interest. Their dissemination through a research article (co-author Mircea Comşa) is planned for 2015.

In relation to *voter characteristics*, the analyses explore the impact of political knowledge, subjective political information, general interest in politics, party identification, and time of vote decision on the personalization of voting. At this moment, stable conclusions are formulated in relation to the last Romanian legislative election. *Political knowledge* (objectively measured) appears to stimulate the manifestation of leader effects. *Party identification* also appears to contribute to a higher level of personalization of electoral decision. This second conclusion is extremely challenging, as it comes against most of the findings in Western societies, except for the German election of 1998 (Brettschneider and Gabriel 2002; Gidengil 2011). *Subjective political information, political engagement, and time of the voting decision* do not have any significant effect on the personalization of electoral decision. These findings were previously disseminated in the context of two international conferences (Iaşi, May 2014, International Conference of the Romanian Sociological Society; Rome, July 2014, 37th Annual Scientific Meeting of the International Society of Political Psychology). **Section deleted in order to avoid interfering with the reviewing process.**

A second category of results to be discussed here approaches *additional findings connected to the core topic* of the research project. Such research directions bring collateral benefits to the investigation efforts involved in the project.

One such topic addresses the *problem of social and political values* defining the cultural contexts (Central and Eastern Europe versus Western Europe) in which electoral competitions occur. The article published in *Sociologia - Slovak Sociological Review* (co-author Horaţiu Rusu) investigates the degree to which a deficit in transnational solidarity (regarded as a social value) is reflected into anti-EU enlargement attitudes. This core hypothesis gains substantive confirmation: increased levels of transnational solidarity appear to confine anti-enlargement attitudes, with no significant differences old and new members of European Union.

Another topic of additional results addresses the issue of *measurement in election studies under the influence of social desirability effects*. The article written together with Mircea Comşa and accepted for publication by *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* employs a split-ballot survey experiment in an attempt to assess the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in compensating for the social desirability bias in electoral surveys. It compares the effects of three alternatives of 'loaded' turnout questions, providing variable information on the occurrence of non-voting behaviour (many people/around half of the people/one out of two people did not vote) and

invariant face-saving response options. The analyses show that the 'half' counter-biasing formula is systematically more effective in reducing the social desirability bias than the alternatives, which perform rather similarly. When compared to externally validated turnout, it appears that, after applying the counter-biasing techniques, turnout over-reporting due to social desirability remains at approximately 6 to 9 percent.

Further direct and additional conclusions of the project are to be formulated and discussed in the final year of the project (2015).

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