

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL LEADERS ON VOTING IN ROMANIA

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1. POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE PERSONALISATION OF ELECTORAL POLITICS

Classic models have generally placed political parties at the centre of any explanation of voting behaviour during parliamentary elections. According to such a perspective, elections should be regarded as competitions among political parties (hence group actors) legitimized through a specific placement in relation to the main cleavages a society has to deal with at a particular moment of time. As a consequence, personal characteristics of a candidate for public office are not expected to bear great influence upon the electoral decision, especially in societies where latent conflicts among large social groups tend to set the general framework for the electoral competition. A significant transformation in the relevance for the electoral decision of such frozen political alignments is anticipated by Otto Kircheimer in a famous essay (1966), discussing a new species of parties, *catch-all*, seriously challenging the old-fashioned class-mass parties and denominational mass parties. Catch-all parties are defined in terms of: (a) drastic reduction of the ideological baggage; (b) strengthening of top leadership groups; (c) downgrading the role of the individual party member; (d) de-emphasis of the specific social-class or denominational clientele; (e) securing access to a variety of interest groups (Kircheimer, 1966: 190).

The change anticipated by Kircheimer finally occurred, involving the generalization of the new party species. Consequently, from the electoral perspective, political leaders have begun to play an increasingly important role. This role of political leaders in the game of elections encompasses at least two dimensions, namely *presentation* and *impact* (Mughan, 2000: 11). The first one relates to the way political parties choose to present themselves to the public, setting their leaders as the core element or the public face of the party. The

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second one relates to the presumed effects of leader's personality and behaviour on the voting patterns of the citizens.

The two dimensions define the phenomenon referred in the literature as the *personalization* of electoral politics or the *presidentialization of voting*¹. It involves a growing tendency to associate the electoral decision in favour of a party or another with the image of its leader, but also to identify the party itself with the leader. As a consequence, the personal characteristics of political leaders are expected to have a growing impact on the party vote during parliamentary elections. Although still debated in the literature, because of rather inconsistent empirical findings, the personalization thesis is largely taken for granted by campaign strategists all over the world. Thus, electoral campaigns are regarded as increasingly 'personalized' (Schmitt and Ohr, 2000), 'presidentialized' (Crewe and King, 1994; Mughan, 2000; Poguntke and Webb, 2005) or 'candidate-centered' (Wattenberg, 1991). Explanations for such a change in the voting patterns in parliamentary elections, but also in the way such campaigns are fought, are not linked exclusively to the substantive transformations faced by political parties, but also to other relevant factors that are to be outlined in the next section of this paper.

2. THE CAUSES OF PRESIDENTIALIZATION

Change in the patterns of mass communication, with a growing role of electronic media (especially television), is the phenomenon most widely referred to in the literature in relationship to the presidentialization of voting (Bean and Mughan, 1989; McAllister, 1996, 2007; King, 2000; Schmitt and Ohr, 2000; Poguntke and Webb, 2005). Television focuses on image for broadcasting political information and, for this purpose, is in a desperate need for faces. Thus, it is just natural for television to use politicians as a vehicle for disseminating information, while disregarding abstract ideas, institutions or political documents. Additionally, television has the capacity to reveal, more directly and more authentically than any other mean of mass communication, a multitude of nonverbal attributes of politicians: facial appearance, style, clothing, and body language (Schmitt and Ohr, 2000: 6).

¹ Presidentialization of voting is frequently regarded in the literature as a constituent of a larger process of presidentialization of parliamentary systems. As a process, the presidentialization involves a transformation in the functional logic of parliamentarianism along three directions: an increase in the power resources of the prime ministers within the executive, an increase in the autonomy vis-à-vis his/her own party, and the personalization of the electoral process (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 4-5).

On the other side, voters might find it easier to manage political issues by reference to leaders and their media representations. Hence, the information costs of the individual voter are significantly reduced: while, before the age of the television, developing an individual position related to various issues was a rather difficult (perhaps even prohibitive) task, the use of individual politicians as reference frames for political topics has significantly simplified the choice of the voter. The voters might empathize or not with the politician's goals, might put themselves or not in their shoes. However, it's likely that the voters shall gain a better understanding of the politician's views and understandings (McAllister, 2007: 579). Thus, for television, political leaders represent a *visual shortcut* in the effort of capturing and retaining the viewers' attention on political issues (McAllister, 2007: 579), while for the viewers they act as an *information shortcut* for forming electoral decisions in favour or against parties (Popkin, 1994: 61). Later prevalence of commercial private television has further amplified such changes (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 15). In order to gain larger shares of viewers, private television frequently combined information and entertainment in a mixed *infotainment* (Schmitt and Ohr, 2000: 6), leaving no place to anything else than the *human element* of politics. Thus, political leaders turned fast into TV *superstars* (Schwartzberg, 1995: 12-14, Gidengil et al., 2000: 3).

Political parties adjusted their strategies as a reaction to transformations in the media system. Leaders turned into the 'public faces' of political parties and their discourse adapted to the logic and format of television by focusing extensively on symbolism instead of substance (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 15). This is mainly a conscious choice taken by politicians in order to exploit the visual media's potential for simplification and symbolism for their own purposes (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 15).

Erosion of traditional electoral alignments is another cause of presidentialization widely mentioned in the literature (Wattenberg, 1991; McAllister, 1996, 2007; Schmitt and Ohr, 2000). The traditional ties between parties and social groups, developed along political cleavage lines, have faced a continuous decline during the last decades, in spite of considerable efforts done by political parties to revitalize them. Such dealignments reflected in a continuous decline in both party membership and turnout (McAllister, 2007: 582-583). While traditional cleavage politics had previously assumed a coherent political program addressing the aligned electorate is the key to electoral success, dealignment has largely subverted the very substance of such a strategy. Political parties had to face more heterogeneous electorates, both socially and ideologically, less interested in the 'ideology' and the loyalties of the social group they belong to (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 15), and

consequently more volatile (Wattenberg, 1991: 2). Thus, group identification has turned into a rather lousy predictor of voting behaviour, with a limited and decreasing mobilization potential. Once the catch-all strategy has been adopted by a large majority of political parties, the signals transmitted towards social groups became more ambiguous, as political manifestos were targeting rather heterogeneous categories of voters.

As a consequence, large categories of voters became 'available' (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 16) on the electoral market, politically dealigned and ideologically confuse, potentially easy to 'catch' and, eventually, mobilize. Parties reacted with a strategic increase in the focus given to political leaders and their attributes, considered to be the appropriate tools for re-mobilizing the electorate. Thus, personal characteristics of the candidates became elements largely exploited in the campaign strategies, in a deliberate attempt to extrapolate the positive image of candidates towards their parties as a whole.

A general shift in voters' awareness from local elections to national elections might be regarded as a simultaneous result of the decline in the ties between parties and social groups and of the changes in the patterns of mass communication about politics. National politics is by its nature more spectacular and hence more able to draw citizens' attention. Moreover, resources invested by the political actors in national campaigns are significantly higher than in local ones, meaning a more fascinating representation for the public. If in context of print (or even audio) media national politics was hardly accessible to most of the voters, television has radically transformed things. National politics is nowadays easily accessible to everyone having a TV and it became a much simpler business than ever before, thanks to parties' efforts of adaptation to the television formats and standards. Furthermore, *the growth in the role of the state* in contemporary societies, after the second world war, has supplementary nourished this orientation of the voters towards the national context of politics instead of the local one. Since national politics mainly uses political leaders as agents of electoral mobilization (rather than local networks, based on group loyalties, as it was the case in local politics), this shift should be regarded as bringing up additional leadership-centeredness in electoral politics.

The internationalization of politics has largely reduced the relevance of collective decision-making bodies, at least at national level. A growing share of the political problems governments have to face can only be dealt with via international cooperation, involving inter-governmental cooperation (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 13). The globalization of political decisions has shifted the power to high rank executive actors (prime ministers, presidents), while deliberative bodies (parliaments, even cabinets) find themselves in the

uncomfortable position of simply ratifying decisions taken elsewhere (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 13-14). Thus, individual actors (leaders) concentrate more decisional resources and, consequently, more visibility, to the detriment of group actors (parliaments, parties).

The increasing complexity of political issues in the last decades has additionally nourished the voters' severe need for a simplification of their political representations. Thus, they might find easier to associate political power and authority with a readily identifiable political personality than with an abstract institution or political ideal (McAllister, 1996: 287). For the ordinary citizen, it's easier to hold *individuals* accountable for political actions than an institution or an ideology. Such a mechanism of building political representations will hold direct consequences upon how ordinary people design their representations on political parties and elections.

3. ANALYTICAL STRATEGIES

Analysing the effects of political leaders on party voting is a difficult task. There are rather few authors that contest the very existence of leader effects. Usually, the dispute is focused upon the strength of leader effects in the electoral decision-making process. At the origins of this dispute lie the difficulty of disentangling the effects of leaders' personalities and other personal attributes borne on individuals' vote decisions from the influences of all the other factors, such as group loyalties, partisan likes or dislikes, personal values, ideological preferences, previous performance of political parties (King, 2002: 14-15). In other words, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate 'pure' leadership effects without being contaminated with influences from other variables. Broadly speaking, there are three analytical strategies mentioned in the literature for measuring leadership effects: the *experimental strategy*, the *improved-prediction strategy*, and the *counterfactual strategy* (Crewe and King, 1994: 185-187; King, 2002: 15-21). Following, we shall briefly discuss each of the three strategies, in an attempt to review the specific advantages and disadvantages involved by such approaches.

A pure experimental design would imply running a considerable number of national elections with a strict control of alternative explanatory variables, allowing exclusively variations of stimuli related to the personalities and other personal characteristics of the parties' leaders or candidates. Obviously, in this pure format, the experimental strategy is impossible to execute. Additionally, such a design would fail to consider the indirect leader

effects on voting (the influence exerted via leaders' activity inside the party organization or the government).

Experimental studies focusing on the personalization of electoral politics attempt to simulate an electoral context in which stimuli are represented by fictitious candidates that 'express themselves' by the means of pictures/flyers (Rosenberg et al., 1986) or video clips (Jenssen and Aalberg, 2006). The experimental group (university students or customers of a local store) is introduced to pictures/video clips of the candidates, but also to additional information about their party affiliation, issue positions adopted and their background (education, occupation, political experience) (Rosenberg et al., 1986: 114-117). In the Norwegian experiment, video clips reproduce discourses of real politicians, by the means of fictitious candidates played by professional actors (Jenssen and Aalberg, 2006: 258-261). Hence, such studies attempt to reproduce an electoral context, under which they manipulate different stimuli related to personal characteristics of the candidates, with a strict control of alternative explanatory factors for the electoral decision. However, there is very little to do in order to avoid the artificiality of such an electoral context, although the subjects appeared to have taken the task of voting quite seriously in both cases (Rosenberg et al., 1986: 117; King, 2002: 16; Jenssen and Aalberg, 2006: 261). Both experimental studies confirm the hypothesis of a significant impact that personal characteristics of the candidates bear on the vote decision².

The improved-prediction strategy chooses a different approach for dealing with the need to measure 'pure' leadership effects. It attempts a statistical measurement of the additional explanatory power brought in a model of party vote by the personal judgments on political leaders. In other words, it assumes the explanatory variables of vote coming from alternative models (voters' values, ideological affiliations, party preferences, group loyalties, retrospective perceptions of recent performance in office) that are entered to multiple regressions as independent variables, in order to statistically control their effects. The goal of such a design is a precise measurement of the additional explanatory power (improvement in prediction) brought to such multiple regression models by the evaluations of political leaders. The improved-prediction strategy is extensively used into analyses of the personalization of the electoral politics. It is employed in a famous series of studies by Warren E. Miller and J. Merrill Shanks dedicated to the U.S. presidential elections of the 1980s and 1990s (Miller and Shanks, 1982, 1996; Shanks and Miller, 1990, 1991). Miller and

² Obviously, the two experimental studies are not comparable, neither in terms of design, nor of results. There is a significant number of variables that should also be taken into consideration, like the political system, the electoral system, the party system, the type of elections simulated etc.

Shanks explain the choices of individual voters as being a cumulative effect of several factors temporally ordered: (1) partisan and ideological predispositions, (2) policy preferences, (3) performance evaluations, (4) issue distances between respondent and the candidates, and (5) other (non-political) candidate evaluations (Miller and Shanks, 1982: 341). Thus, each of the five factors has a ‘net’ contribution (and theoretically measurable) in the formation of the vote decision. Their ordering is not at all arbitrary, as the sequence starts with more stable factors (far from the electoral decision) and continues with less stable and more contextual ones (nearer in time to the individual’s final vote decision)³. Perhaps the most explicit use of the improved-prediction strategy in the analysis of the personalization of the vote decision comes from Schmitt and Ohr (2000). They employ the so-called ΔR^2 strategy for analysing the relevance of leader effects on voting in Germany for the period between 1961 and 1998. Hence, they measure the additional variance in the party vote (R^2) explained by leaders’ evaluations (net effects), after controlling for the effects of social-structural factors and party/ideological identification (Schmitt and Ohr, 2000: 16).

The counterfactual strategy is somehow linked to the experimental strategy and relies on the technique of *thought-experiments*, emphasizing the explicit answers to ‘What if?’ questions. What if John Edwards were the Democrat challenger of George W. Bush for the American presidency instead of John Kerry? An infinite number of such counterfactual questions can be formulated, at least theoretically, about a single electoral competition, and consequently an infinite number of thought-experiments are needed. In practice, as Mughan (2002: 19) noticed, the few authors adopting the counterfactual strategy have chosen to run their thought-experiments on counterfactuals for which real-world data are available.

Bean and Mughan employ this strategy in the final section of a highly influential article on leadership effects in parliamentary elections in Australia and Britain (1989). Their counterfactual question refers to the possible electoral effect of a reversal in the personal profiles of the two main party leaders in elections of 1987 in Australia and 1983 in Britain (the Labour leader John Hawke and the Conservative John Howard in the first case, respectively Conservative Margaret Thatcher and Labour leader Michael Foot in the second case). Based on British Election Study (1983) and Australian Election Study (1987) data, Bean and Mughan develop a projection of the election results in the hypothetical case of the ‘losers’ (Howard and Foot respectively) would have been perceived by the electorate

³ In their view, earlier more stable factors will simultaneously have a direct influence on the vote decision, but also an indirect one, via influencing later less stable factors (King, 2002: 18).

similarly to the winners (Hawke and Thatcher respectively) in terms of personal characteristics⁴. Results suggest a significant influence of leaders' personal characteristics upon the party vote⁵. Thus, Bean and Mughan's strategy provides an estimation of the vote gains brought by having the 'right' party leader (Bean and Mughan, 1989: 1175).

4. DEFINING EXPECTATIONS: LEADERS IN THE ROMANIAN SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

History gives leaders a central part in Romanian political life, be them "voievod", princes, kings or Communist dictators. With the notable exception of kings, in each of these cases we can identify leaders that went far beyond acceptable barriers for the exercise of power in a modern constitutional regime. The last of the series, the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime, contributed through its extreme degree of personalization and arbitrary decision-making to defining the contemporary concept of *sultanism* (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 44-45, 51-54; Pasquino, 2002: 286-289). Nevertheless, the periods when political life was dominated by single actors alternated with periods when collective actors successfully counterbalanced the autocratic tendencies of leaders. Among these collective actors we should mention assemblies of aristocrats, the Diet of Transylvania (both during the medieval age), and the proto-political parties and the parliament (in the modern age). Given these aspects, it is almost impossible to define some clear expectations regarding the role and relevance of political leaders for the electoral competition, based on analyzing historical events or traditions. Despite the numerous examples of political leaders exercising power in a discretionary manner, we can hardly say that these examples are characteristic of a given historical period, no matter what that period would be. Nevertheless, collective memory seems to be dominated by the images of such leaders, sketched in highly positive shades, which determines many to see nostalgia of powerful leaders at population level.

Fresh memories of the sultanistic regime determined the 1990 Constituent Assembly to opt for *semipresidentialism*, which would limit the potential authoritarian tendencies of the

⁴ Respondents were offered a limited set of attributes (caring, determined, shrewd, likable as a person, tough, listens to reason, decisive, sticks to principles, effective) and asked about the degree to which the main two party leaders possess such attributes. Additionally, they were asked to offer a score of the perceived effectiveness of alternative leaders (Bean and Mughan, 1989: 1168).

⁵ Regression models employed by Bean and Mughan in the British case suggest that if Foot had had Thatcher's personality profile, other things being equal, Labour's vote in 1983 would have been 6-7 percentage points higher. In the Australian case, the contrast in personality profiles would have translated into 4 percentage points (Bean and Mughan, 1989: 1175).

president by giving him limited prerogatives⁶. Regardless of this aspect, the Constituent Assembly also opts for a directly elected president, solution which is often seen as a corrective mechanism in the event of the emergence of a highly fragmented party system (Siaroff, 2003: 308). Consequently there is a contradiction between the position of a president, well above the typical president in a parliamentary regime, and his real prerogatives, that contributes to diminishing his role within the state. The results was often characterized as *parliamentarism with a presidential corrective* (Siaroff, 2003: 287, 308), with unclear implications for the personalization of voting. On the one hand the electoral competition for the presidential office will stimulate the appearance of strong personalities, capable of launching multiple messages aimed at the voters; while on the other hand, the prerogatives suggest a secondary position once the electoral process is finished. Despite these unclear constitutional implications, our expectations converge toward strong leader effects, created by the joint organizing of presidential and legislative elections. At the same time, it is our expectation that these leader effects will diminish in time, as a result of the separation of presidential and legislative elections following the changes brought to the constitution by law no. 429/2003⁷.

Another regulation regarding electoral competition with potential impact upon the intensity of voting personalization is law no. 68/1992 regarding the election of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, which introduces a proportional representation system with closed lists. This electoral formula gives the image and the reputation of the candidates the lowest possible influence on voting (Carey and Shugart, 1995: 424), transferring to the party label the essential part in the formation of the voting decision. It is to be expected that such an institutional framework will successfully inhibit the personalization of electoral politics at constituency level, but it will not have a similar effect on the transfer of popularity from the leaders of the national party, especially since legislative and presidential elections are simultaneous.

A different set of expectations is outlined by the change of electoral formula introduced by law no. 35/2008 - from PR with closed lists to a mixed system (majority voting in single seat constituencies, with redistribution mechanisms). It is expected that this

⁶ The prerogatives of the president of Romania can be separated into three categories: prerogatives of representation (he or she is representative because he or she is legitimated via direct expression of the will of the people, but also he or she represents the state, inside and outside Romania), prerogatives of safeguarding (the state and the constitution) and prerogatives of mediation (between different public authorities or between society and public authorities) (Deleanu, 1998b: 334-339).

⁷ A change to the Romanian Constitution by Law no. 429 /2003 expands the presidential term from 4 to 5 years, while the term of the members of parliament remains 4 years. Thus, the presidential and legislative elections are separated and can only be organized simultaneously every 20 years.

change would give extra meaning to the image and personality of local candidates to the expense of the leaders of the national party and party etiquette in general. But such consequences can only be anticipated and, since the effects of this change will become obvious at a moment of time outside the reach of this paper, I will not address them.

Literature emphasizes the *erosion of traditional alignments* among the factors that contributed to the increase in personalization of electoral politics. This erosion left behind an ideologically confused, de-aligned and volatile electorate (Poguntke and Webb, 2005: 16), that needed to be ‘captured’ by appeal to the personal qualities of the candidates. Such an explanation loses all relevance when we look at new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, where we do not have stable party systems or long term party and ideological identification materialized in consolidated electoral alignments. Nevertheless, we can not neglect some similarities between the erosion of traditional alignments in Western Europe and the formation and consolidation of Central and Eastern European party systems that manifest at the voter level: low ideological and political party involvement; weak party identification; generalized dissatisfaction, lack of trust and alienation regarding politics; and high electoral volatility. Once we delineate this similarity between the two historical periods in party system evolution, there seem to be enough premises to consider the *party system development and consolidation stage* a facilitating factor in the personalization of politics in Central and Eastern Europe, in general, and Romania, in particular. Moreover, individual personalities remain an element of stability in the context of a young, fragmented and unstable, party system (for a similar argument see Kitschelt, 1995; Ștefuriuc, 2003).

[Table 1 about here]

The *accelerated development of the Romanian media system*, especially of broadcasting, is probably the most important facilitating factor for the personalization of electoral politics. Dominantly uninformed, politically or ideologically not aligned, and lacking a consolidated political culture, voters found an unexpected simplification of political life in the mass media, especially in television programs, given by the projection of the human element into politics. It is expected that the personalization of politics found a catalyst in the *increased market share of private commercial television stations*, at the expense of the public service, especially after 1998 (Coman, 2003: 110-111). For a while this domination only materialized in urban areas (see Table 1) because private television stations lacked the technical means to cover rural areas as well. In time this domination generalized, commercial broadcasting

companies such as MediaPro (Pro TV) and Intact (Antena 1) obtained dominant positions not only with the generalist TV stations but also with the specialized ones: sports, news, etc. (Coman, 2003: 111). Commercial television programming included more and more shallow political information, impregnated with sensationalist or entertaining elements, while popularizing political ‘characters’ in detriment of political ideas, issues and parties. A similar phenomenon is identified in the print media, where *tabloidization* via reorientation on image in detriment of text and sensational in detriment of usual is the norm. Given the fact that tabloidization is a top-down phenomenon motivated by commercial constraints (Hallin, 2000: 233) applicable to all mass media used by voters in extracting political information, it is very unlikely that media did not exercised significant influence over segments of the electoral body, segments that finish up perceiving politics in terms of characters rather than issues and symbolic rather than substantial terms.

In the end of this discussion we should analyze the impact on vote decision of three other categories of factors, frequently mentioned in the literature: the internationalization of politics, the increased complexity of political issues and the transformations in the role of the state within the society. Approaching these factors as a whole is justified, in our opinion, by the fact that we believe they exercised a low degree of influence, at least for the period of time analyzed in this paper. The *internationalization of politics* is on an ascending trajectory in collective perceptions during the post-communist transition, starting with sporadic contacts with international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank) and culminating with visible influence exercised by international organizations to which Romania proposed and managed to adhere (NATO, EU). Even if, for most of the population, the place and part of these institutions in Romania’s democratization remained unclear, it is expected that the multiplication of contacts with these institutions brought into the spotlight a series of individual political actors (presidents, prime ministers, foreign affairs ministers, finance ministers, negotiators, etc.) in detriment of collective actors (parliament, government). Accompanied by *an increased complexity of political issues*, it is very likely that this phenomenon generated an increase in the prestige and visibility of individual political actors, materialized in a growing relevance for the formation of voting decisions. Thus, we expect that both phenomena stimulated the personalization of voting, without considering their role as essential, since they both marginally affect most of the electoral body.

[Figure 1 about here]

The need for decentralization specific to the transition from communism to democracy and free market naturally reflected itself in a step by step *diminishing of the role played by the state in society*. Such a retreat of the state resulted in a natural decrease of the resources available to the national top leadership, as well as in a clear delineation of the leverages for intervention in economy and society. Still, these transformations reflected very late at the level of social perceptions of these offices and their holders. If we correlate these changes with party alternation in these offices, and also with the increased competition between national and local leaders, it is very likely that a depersonalization in the perception of public offices becomes manifest, accompanied by a similar effect in terms of competition for these offices.

Summarizing, we may say that Romania's case generates unclear expectations about the personalization of politics. Even though there is a significant number of institutional mechanisms meant to inhibit this phenomenon, there is also a significant number of historical, cultural, structural and institutional factors, as well as some institutional inconsistencies, that diminish the effects of the institutional mechanisms mentioned. Nevertheless, taking into account both the facilitating and inhibiting factors (Figure 1), it is our expectation that the manifestation of this phenomenon is well above the average Western European consolidated democracy.

5. DATA SOURCES AND DIRECTIONS OF ANALYSIS

The hypothesis of personalization is obviously a dynamic one. The nature of such a hypothesis demands a specific strategy for analysis – longitudinal, on an extensive period of time. The attempt to apply such an analytic strategy to the phenomenon of personalization of voting in post-communist Romania is blocked by the limited amount of data available, especially for the first decade after the fall of communism. Basically, the number of independent studies dedicated to voting behaviour between 1990 and 1999 is limited⁸, most of the times batteries of questions referring to this phenomenon being included in broader

⁸ Among these we should mention: the May 1990 exit poll by IRSOP and INFAS Bonn (coordinated by Petre Datculescu and Klaus Liepelt); two September 1992 IRSOP surveys done with three weeks, respectively four days, before elections; the September 1992 exit poll by IRSOP and INFAS Bonn; the June-July 1993 survey by Science Center Berlin and Informatix România as part of the "Election Studies from Eastern Europe" project (coordinated by Georgeta Muntean); the "Romanian Political Culture" survey from November-December 1996, which included a battery of questions for the "Comparative Study of Electoral Systems" (coordinated by Cătălin Baba, Gabriel Bădescu and Paul Sum).

research endeavours. In this category, in terms of data consistency, we mention the Public Opinion Barometers (BOP), a series of surveys funded by the Open Society Foundation between 1994 and 2007⁹, which constantly included a battery of questions focused on voting intentions and confidence in public personalities. The last eight years were marked by a more coherent presence of studies focused on voting behaviour¹⁰, but results are still far from the place and significance given to this phenomenon in other democratic countries.

In the attempt to analyze the personalization of electoral politics from a *longitudinal perspective* we used the battery of political questions from the BOPs from 1995 to 2006, data collected during 12 years and 4 electoral cycles. Given the characteristics of the data available, we focused on indicators of behavioural intentionality and not on indicators of actual political behaviour. More exactly, we focused on survey data collected regularly (every three or six months), containing at least the following variables: declared voting intentions for legislative and presidential elections, declared confidence in the political leaders, socio-demographical variables. For the purposes of this analysis some variables were subject to successive recoding. First, the dependent variable – ‘voting intention in the legislative elections’ – was transformed, for each political party included in the analysis, in a dummy variable, with two response categories: voting for the party X and voting for any other party, with non-responses being eliminated. Only voting intention for political parties deemed relevant¹¹ was included in the analysis, taking into account political relevance (represented in the parliament during the time interval analyzed) and electoral relevance (cumulative, they cover over 95 percent of the voting intentions). Secondly, the independent variable – ‘confidence in political leaders’¹² – was transformed in a *confidence in political leaders score* as follows: ‘a lot of confidence’ answers were associated with 2 points, ‘some confidence’ with 1 points, ‘little confidence’ with -1 point, ‘very little confidence’ with -2 points. Non-responses were excluded, as well as ‘I do not know him or her’ answers, which we interpreted as an indicator of lack of political visibility. Based on

⁹ Data collection by CURS, Metro Media Transilvania, Gallup România and LUAS.

¹⁰ Among these we should mention: the “Political Culture and Civic Engagement in Romania” study, November-December 2004, including the “Comparative Study of Electoral Systems” battery of questions (coordinated by Gabriel Bădescu); a study by the Romanian Society for Political Science (SRSP) - “Parties, Organizations, and Individual Actors: Behavior, Influence, and Political Recruitment” (coordinated by Laurențiu Ștefan, Aurelian Muntean, Răzvan Grecu and Andrei Gheorghică); as well as two dedicated Public Opinion Barometers, from October 2004 and November 2006.

¹¹ From the relevant political parties we excluded the Democrat Union of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată a Maghiarilor din România, UDMR), for reasons related to its exclusively ethnic electoral background.

¹² Measured in the Public Opinion Barometers via a closed question, “How much trust do you have in the following political personalities: (a) a lot; (b) some; (c) little; (d) very little; (e) I do not know him or her; (f) I don’t know/Not responding?”.

individual scores, we built an *index of confidence* in a certain political leader, calculated as an average between scores given to the respective individual by the entire sample at a certain moment in time. The index obtained varies in the $[-3; +2]$ ¹³ interval, with positive values reflecting a favourable level of confidence in the respective political leader and negative values reflecting in an ‘average’ situation of social mistrust¹⁴. From the longitudinal perspective, our analysis is structured on two levels. On the first level, dominantly descriptive, we look at the *evolution of the confidence in political leaders indexes* for over a decade, in connection with main political events. The second level is dedicated to the analysis of the *intensity of association between the index of confidence and voting intention* for the political parties represented by these leaders, as well as to variations in its intensity. It is obvious that, in order to support the hypothesis of personalization of voting for legislative elections, we expect a significant and dynamically relevant level of association.

The longitudinal study of the personalization of electoral politics is complemented with a *cross-sectional perspective* on the phenomenon, focused on the November-December 2004 general elections. We chose to focus on this election due to the extremely dynamic character of the electoral race, as well as due to availability of data issues. We are referring to the ‘Political Culture and Civic Engagement in Romania’ (CPICR)¹⁵ national two-wave (pre- and post-elections) panel study. The cross-sectional analysis tries to measure the ‘gross’ and ‘net’ effects of leader evaluations (independent variable, IV) on political parties’ evaluations and voting intentions (dependent variables, DV), by introducing them into multiple regression models while controlling for alternative explanatory variables (socio-demographics, party identification, retrospective evaluations). The proposed analysis is in line with a more general *improved-prediction strategy*, being built on a logic similar to the one proposed by Schmitt and Ohr (2000), and aims at explaining intentions to vote for the

¹³ The apparent disequilibrium of the index’s variation interval is due to a disequilibrium in the structure of the categories of answers provided to respondents in the POBs starting May 1999. There is a supplementary negative response category compared to older POBs, namely “not at all” to which no positive category corresponds. We associated -3 points to this category which, in case of 100 percent answers placed in this category, would lead to the index being equal with -3.

¹⁴ Traditional analyses of confidence in political personalities resource, for presentation purposes, to summing up the positive (confidence) and negative (no confidence) categories and comparing the totals as follows: “x% of the population displays high and very high confidence in Z, while (100-x)% of the population displays low and very low confidence in the same personality”. The index used in this paper – in the formula presented above – has the obvious advantage of introducing a qualitative criterium into the final evaluation. Moreover, by obtaining single scores for each candidate at a certain moment in time, the index allows for easier and nuanced comparison between the confidence scores of the political leaders.

¹⁵ Data collection was financed by joining several resources coming from the CNCSIS A 382/2004 grant - “Political Culture and Civic Engagement in Romania” (Gabriel Bădescu), research funds from Princeton University (Grigore Pop-Elecheș), Central European University (Marina Popescu) and OSI International Policy Fellowship (Aurelian Muntean), and the CNCSIS BD 85/2003 research scholarship (Andrei Gheorghită).

main competitors in the 2004 general elections, namely the National Union PSD+PUR (Uniunea Națională PSD+PUR, PSD+PUR)¹⁶ and the ‘Justice and Truth’ PNL-PD Alliance (Alianța „Dreptate și Adevăr” PNL-PD, ADA). We focus on two distinct categories of regression models: the first test the effects of leader evaluations¹⁷ on the perceptions of the political party, while the second tests the impact of leader evaluations on the intention to vote for the political party represented by the leader. In the first category of regression models the dependent variable (the evaluation of the political party) takes the form of an evaluative 0-10 score of the liking/disliking toward the respective party¹⁸ and we measure the gross impact of leader evaluations on party evaluation (R^2 of the model with one dependent and one independent variable) or net impact (ΔR^2 in multiple regression models). The net effect/impact is the increase of explained variation we obtain by introducing leader evaluation as an independent variable in the multiple regression model next to/together with other explanatory variables or, in other words, the increase in R^2 obtained by introducing IV (compared to a similar model that only lacks the leader evaluation IV). A similar strategy is behind the second category of regression models, where we try to measure the gross and net effects of leader evaluation on the intention to vote for a certain political party. In this case, the dependent variables are obtained by dummy-zation of the categories of the closed question from the first CPICR wave¹⁹.

The choice of supplementary explanatory variables controlled for in the regression models needs to be discussed separately. Naturally, there are two categories of criteria that should guide such a choice: theoretical expectations (starting from alternative explanatory models of voting) on the one side, and availability of data on the other side. A thorough taking into account of both criteria led to the choice of three categories of explanatory variables: (a) *party identification* variables (closeness to the political party, ideological distance, voting in the last local elections); (b) *retrospective evaluation* of government activity variables (evaluation of general government performance, evaluation of government performance in fighting corruption) and (c) *socio-demographic* variables (age, region, residence in urban or

¹⁶ There are some differences in CPICR questions when referring to the National Union PSD+PUR. The question regarding the perception of political parties refers strictly to the PSD (with no reference to the alliance with PUR), while the question regarding voting intentions refers explicitly to PSD+PUR.

¹⁷ Measured in CPICR through a closed question: “Please express your degree of liking for each of the following politicians”, on a scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means “I do not like him at all” and 4 is “I like him a lot”.

¹⁸ Measured in CPICR through a closed question: “I would like to know what you think about some of the political parties in Romania. After I read the name of a party please give a mark between 0 and 10, where 0 means you do not like that party at all and 10 means that you like it a lot”.

¹⁹ Via building dichotomic variables with the categories: vote for party X and vote for any other party. Non-responses were eliminated.

rural areas). A detailed explanation of the strategy for choosing and building these explanatory variables can be found in Appendix 1.

The last direction of analysis is dedicated to *the formation of leader evaluations*, in an attempt to measure how large are the effects of leaders' perceived personality traits on their popularity scores, while controlling for alternative explanations (party/ideological identification, retrospective evaluations) in OLS regression models. The *relevance of the political knowledge* for the explanatory models is additionally examined.

Summarizing, the following sections focus on four directions for analysis. First, we look at the *evolution of the confidence indexes in the political leaders*, for the period 1995-2006, in a dominantly descriptive manner. Secondly, we analyze the relationship between the *confidence in the political leaders* and *vote intentions for the party they represent*, in an attempt to build an image of the transfers of electoral capital between political leaders and their parties. Thirdly, we try to *measure the impact of leaders on the perception of and vote intentions for political parties*. Fourth, we *investigate the mechanisms of leader evaluations* for the two main presidential candidates in the 2004 Romanian elections.

6. PARTY LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS IN THE PUBLIC OPINION

A longitudinal analysis of survey data should explicitly reflect the social realities (and the changes in social realities) that shape the particular moment of data gathering. Any significant historical event is expected to bear some degree of influence upon the data. Thus, the first level of the analysis is dedicated to a longitudinal perspective on the evaluations of the main political leaders' in the Public Opinion Barometer (POB) national surveys.

An overview of the *confidence indexes* in the main political leaders calculated for the 1995-2006 period (Appendix 2) suggests the occurrence of significant variations over time. Indexes vary between a minimum of -1,81 (Valeriu Stoica, May 2001) and a maximum of +0,40 (Ion Iliescu, March 1995). Positive values are rare, only five political leaders being able to score positively over a period of twelve years: Ion Iliescu, Emil Constantinescu, Petre Roman, Teodor Meleşcanu, and Traian Băsescu. For the beginning, it should be emphasized that, in the case of three of them, positive scores are related to the election in/exercise of the presidential office, associated with the highest electoral legitimacy. Furthermore, in the political evolution of each of the five political leaders there is a unique positive peak over time. In other words, no matter how many or how large subsequent

variations might occur, a sub-zero descent from positive scores seems to be irreversible²⁰, none of the five leaders being able to score positively over two different periods of time (separated in time by at least a negative value). Such beginning remarks suggest the existence of a unique outburst of popularity/confidence in the career of a single high rank politician, followed by a continuous erosive process of that political leader, which occurs faster or slower. The fact that Ion Iliescu has his last positive confidence index in October 1996 and is defeated in the presidential elections only a few weeks later can not be ignored at this point. Four years later he wins the presidential elections, although he does not score positive in confidence again.

A hierarchy of political leaders for the interval of analysis is dominated by Ion Iliescu, with continuous positive scores for two years (1995-1996), during the second half of his presidential term 1992-1996: +0,40 in March 1995, +0,21 in June 1995, +0,35 in September 1995, +0,28 in December 1995, +0,22 in July 1996, and +0,15 in October 1996. Another leader scoring remarkably high on confidence indexes is Teodor Meleşcanu, president of a small opposition party, Alliance for Romania (ApR) (separated from the former PDSR - Party of Social Democracy in Romania), during a post-election year (1997): +0,08 in March 1997, +0,20 in June 1997. Corneliu Vadim Tudor, leader of Greater Romania Party (PRM) has the most instable evolution of confidence scores during the period of analysis, with significant oscillations. Although continuously scoring negative due to a categorical rejection from specific categories in the electorate, Corneliu Vadim Tudor has remarkable comebacks during the pre-electoral periods, both in 1996 (an increase of 0,21 points during the electoral year) and 2000 (an increase of 0,60). However, a similar evolution in confidence scores did not occur before the 2004 presidential elections and the PRM leader received only 12,57% of the votes, allowing many commentators to label him an 'expired political product'. Undoubtedly, the most spectacular evolution in our analysis is that of Traian Băsescu, leader of the Democratic Party (PD), that enters the electoral year of 2004 with the lowest confidence score in his entire top political career (-1,05 in October 2003), rises to -0,53 one year later, and reaches a maximum of +0,11 in May 2006, one year and a half after winning the presidential elections.

[Figure 2 about here]

²⁰ However, the evolution of confidence in Traian Băsescu deserves a closer look in the future, in order to identify potential changes in the pattern referred. For the remaining four leaders, a return to positive scores is highly unlikely, given their current 'middle rank' political activity.

Beyond such variations, that are more or less contextual, data show a general decline in confidence given to political leaders, likely to be linked to an evolution in the electorate's experience and abilities to manage electoral information and contexts. For a period of about eight years (beginning 1997 - November 2005), not a single political leader succeeded to score positive on confidence indexes. After that period, Traian Băsescu is the only such case of a politician scoring rather high on confidence.

Leaders of small parties are generally credited with lower scores of confidence than those of big parties. There are rare exceptions (Teodor Meleşcanu, George Becali) from that pattern, with rather inconsistent evolutions. On the other hand, leaders of big parties experience a rapid erosion of confidence while being in office, followed by a slower rise while being in opposition. However, this ascending evolution in opposition never returns them the top level of confidence reached at the beginning of the previous electoral cycle. Such an observation is highly consistent with our previous findings of a systematic erosion of high rank political leaders, asking for a regular 'freshening' of political parties leadership.

7. IS THERE A LINK? CONFIDENCE IN POLITICAL LEADERS AND PARTY VOTE

The next section of this paper aims at measuring the statistical association between voters' evaluations of political leaders²¹ and the expressed party vote intention for the period of analysis. Although it is impossible to speak about the directionality of the relationship between the two variables, we expect higher values in the coefficients of association²² to reflect peaks in the personalization of electoral politics for a specific moment of time. Obviously, such coefficients of association are not *stricto sensu* measures of the leadership effects; however they offer a valid insight into the dynamics of the personalization phenomenon, into its trends and variations. Gamma (γ) coefficients for the

²¹ Measured as 'confidence in political leaders' in the Public Opinion Barometers 1995-2006.

²² Some of the readers of this paper might have serious doubts about the choice of Gamma (γ) coefficient, particularly suited for ordinal-level variables, in our analysis. However, our choice is based on epistemological arguments. As we have mentioned before, the 'vote intention for parliamentary elections' variable is subject to a dummy-zation process for each party that introduces some kind of 'ordinal loading' in the resulting dichotomic variables. In other words, we consider that the dichotomization process (as in A and non-A) introduces a particular type of 'order' in the otherwise nominal-level variable. In our case, we considered that the manifestation of a vote intention for Party A means 'more' than the absence of such an intention. Under these circumstances, we consider the Gamma coefficient to be appropriate enough for measuring the association between leader evaluations and party vote. However, for the readers rejecting such an argument, the same statistical association has also been measured using the contingency coefficients (C), as in Appendix 4.

association between ‘confidence in political leaders’ and ‘party vote for parliamentary elections’ for the period 1995-2006 are presented in Appendix 3.

A first remark relates to the longitudinal distribution of values: it looks like the level of personalization follows an ascendant pattern along an electoral cycle. Leadership effects seem to face a fast decrease immediately after the elections. However, as elections are closer, liking a particular leader converts to a growing degree into vote intention for his/her party. Explanations for the sharp post-electoral decline in the personalization should be placed in the particular framework of previous election’s results, namely separately for winners and losers. In the case of the winners, holders of public offices, either newly elected or re-elected, benefit of an extensive capital of confidence that, most of the times, transcends partisan alignments (honeymoon effect). Such political leaders receive high confidence scores that do not necessarily reflect into vote intention in favour of the parties they represent. This situation will have as an immediate effect a decline in the coefficients of association.

For the ‘losers’, the post-electoral situation is somehow reversed. The party gradually decreases in vote intention, while its leader simply collapses in confidence scores. We might actually speak of a ‘vote of non-confidence’ given to the leader by the party’s electorate, that considers him/her responsible for the electoral defeat. Such is the case of Valeriu Stoica and PNL in 2001, Adrian Năstase and PSD in 2005²³, and, to a certain degree, Ion Iliescu and PDSR in 1997. Actually, it is about a reversed rationality of personalization, by which leaders are sanctioned by their own party’s electorate.

The approaching of the electoral competition brings the highest personalization levels for each of the parties in the analysis. Basically, the association between the vote intention for parliamentary elections and confidence in political leaders follows an ascending trend during the post-election period, with a maximum right before the moment of the next electoral competition. Such a pattern is due not only to the rather normal increase in the leader’s influence on the party vote (mainly because of the pre-election extensive media coverage), but also to the clear identification of the candidate-leader (actually the presidential candidate) in the public mind. Once a unique presidential candidate is identified, an entire arsenal of likes or dislikes concerning other leaders of the party (who suddenly become marginal) are projected towards him/her.

It is rather unclear whether the leader-party relationship works differently in the case of alliances than of (individual) parties. Our expectations, based on previous findings

²³ Although National Union PSD+PUR has won the parliamentary elections of 2004, PSD failed to enter the government coalition, mainly because of having lost the presidential elections.

(Gheorghiuță, 2004: 10), went towards lower leadership effects in the case of political alliances, due to the aggregation of multiple bases of support in favour of the alliance. In other words, the candidate-leader is necessarily a member of one of the allied parties and can not enjoy unconditioned confidence from the supporters of the rest of the parties in the alliance. On the other side, party alliances are built in pre-election periods, when the level of personalization follows an ascending trend. For the whole period of existence of the Democratic Convention (CDR), vote intention is strongly associated with the confidence in its leader (first formal, later informal, as president of the country), Emil Constantinescu, with Gamma coefficients varying between 0,600 and 0,863. For the same interval, such values are lower than in the case of some individual parties (Greater Romania Party - PRM or Party of Social Democracy - PDSR), but higher than those of the Democratic Party (PD). On the other side, during the short existence of Social Democratic Union (USD)²⁴, personalization seems to be significantly higher than it was for the Democratic Party (alliance's main party), although they have the same leader, Petre Roman. However, the last remark should be cautiously accepted, since USD as an electoral alliance is built in an electoral year (1996), coinciding with a natural grow in Gamma coefficients due to the elections' approaching (0,448 in December 1995, 0,801 in July 1996, 0,799 in October 1996).

[Table 2 about here]

A less arguable case is that of the 'Truth and Justice' Alliance PNL-PD (ADA), that lasts, similarly to former CDR, for a rather long period of time. During its effective existence, Public Opinion Barometers have collected the vote intention by an open-ended question, which allowed the respondents to express their support either for ADA as an alliance, or for one of its composing parties, the National Liberal Party (PNL) or the Democratic Party (PD). Obviously, there might be variations both in political preference and political information between the respondents declaring their support for a specific political party and those declaring it for the alliance to which that particular party belongs to. However, in the general context of the leadership effects, a comparison between such subsamples of voters is a must. It is surprising that, for the whole interval of non-conflictual functioning of ADA, confidence in each of the two party leaders is more intensely associated with the vote in favour of the alliance than of their own parties. That

²⁴ An alliance between the Democratic Party (PD) and the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR) for the elections of 1996.

conclusion is valid both for the Democrat leader Traian Băsescu and for the Liberal leaders Theodor Stolojan and, later, Călin Popescu Tăriceanu. Nevertheless, it should be re-emphasized here that coefficients are not calculated on the same voters, but on three non-overlapping subsamples of voters, namely of ADA, PD, and PNL. Things radically change at the moment when the sharp disagreements inside the ‘Truth and Justice’ Alliance (ADA) come to the surface. A major reversal occurs: confidence in Călin Popescu Tăriceanu and, shortly after, confidence in Traian Băsescu tends to associate more intensely with the support for their own parties than for the alliance as a whole. What is the explanation of such a phenomenon? A clear-cut answer beyond any speculation is impossible to give on the available data. However, we can solidly assume that the key to the explanation of such variations in the personalization of vote intention is related to the specific categories of supporters of the two parties that move towards an electoral identification with the alliance (during its ‘good times’, not necessarily electoral periods) and then slowly break off with it (during ‘bad times’ of conflict inside the alliance). Furthermore, it is rather likely for this ‘fluctuant’ electorate to be much more ‘personalized’ in making up its vote option than the rest of PNL and PD supporters. However, in the absence of panel data, the exploration of such assumptions remains impossible.

Intention to vote for smaller parties, with no experience in office (PRM, ApR, PNG), seems to be associated with leader evaluations to greater extent in comparison with parties that made it to governmental structures. Since they are incapable of demonstrating governmental effectiveness, small parties can only use image in order to mobilize electoral resources, and their leaders are the only ones with the prospect of reaching an adequate level of visibility. On the other hand, these are parties lacking a historical tradition, built and developed around a leader, either starting from zero or via separation from another party. The high level of personalization of voting for these parties is a natural consequence, as the leader’s personality is the only electoral resource available and reliable for the respective party.

[Figure 3 about here]

Greater Romania Party (PRM) seems to reach the highest degree of personalization among the relevant parties. During the 12 years analysed, the intensity of association between the level of confidence in the leader, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, and the intention to vote for the party, goes below 0,80 only two times, both at the beginning of an electoral

cycle (0,773 in March 1997 and, respectively, 0,795 in December 1997). The PRM leader seems to be the political personality that performs best in the effort of mobilizing his liking capital in favour of his party. The party is identified with the leader; it does not offer alternative political figures. C.V. Tudor can either be loved or hated, and the first situation automatically translates into votes for PRM. Symbolically speaking, the party is a 'rostrum' without which the 'tribune' can not be heard and voting for the party is connected with the perpetuation of the leader's discursive narchoticisms.

A very similar tendency seems to be consolidating in the case of another party, the PNG²⁵. For many years a party lacking electoral relevance, PNG sees an increase in voting intentions following the election as party leader of George Becali, highly controversial business man and owner of a football club. Even though lacking any political experience at the moment of 'taking over' the party, Becali is a highly visible personality in the national media, due to his connection with football. He successfully manages to convert an image of managerial competence in football, a very popular sport, into political confidence, having a remarkable ascension (Comşa, 2006; Gheorghişă, 2006). At this moment, it is too early to speak about the extent to which George Becali manages to convert his personal confidence capital in votes for his party. Nevertheless, after the arrival of Becali, PNG saw a remarkable increase in vote intentions (5 percent according to the October 2006 POB), and leader effects for this party are among the highest, comparable to the case of PRM (0,921 in May 2006, 0,893 in October 2006).

8. LEADERS' IMPACT ON VOTE INTENTIONS IN THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS

Estimating the 'real' impact of political leaders on party vote remains, no matter the case, a very difficult mission. The analysis of association coefficients between leader evaluations and vote intentions in the legislative elections allows for identification of trends and dynamics of the phenomenon, but not for *stricto sensu* measurement of leader effects. It is very likely that such a strategy overestimates the intensity of these effects (Schmitt and Ohr, 2000: 16), given its incapacity to isolate the influence of a leader's personal characteristics from influences over voting due to some other inter-related factors, such as party identification, group loyalties, ideological preference or satisfaction with prior performance of the respective party. In the attempt to isolate authentic leader effects from

²⁵ New Generation Party (Partidul Noua Generație, PNG), currently New Generation Party - Christian Democrat (Partidul Noua Generație - Creștin Democrat, PNG-CD).

other categories of influences, we resorted to a design based on bi- and multivariate regression models on CPICR data, using voter evaluation of the political party and voting intention for the political party as dependent variables. The R^2 coefficient calculated in bivariate models offers us an image of the *gross effects* of leaders' personal characteristics on the voting intention for legislative elections, when we are not controlling for complementary explanatory variables. Multivariate regression allows for an increase in the explained variance by simultaneously entering the leader evaluations and the alternative explanatory variables into a single model, thus *controlling* for the effects of the latter. The difference between the adjusted R^2 (ΔR^2) calculated for the model offering the maximum level of explained variance and the same coefficient calculated for a similar model, but without leader evaluations as an independent variable, will provide us with an adequate measure of the *net leadership effects* on the dependent variable. The ΔR^2 thus calculated must be interpreted as the additional variance in the dependent variable (party evaluation in the first category of models, voting intentions in the second category) explained by the popularity of the political leader (IV), while controlling for the party/ideological identification, retrospective evaluations of government activity and the voter's positioning in the social structure. The regression models, as well as the results of the analysis, are synthesized in tables 3, 4, 5, and 6.

[Table 3 about here]

A few general remarks are required. First, data confirm the existence of a *significant impact of leader evaluations* on the liking capital of a political party, and also on the intention to vote for that party. Bivariate analyses indicate significant values of *gross effects* in the case of both alliances studied here, PSD+PUR (0,625) and ADA (0,414). Basically, without controlling for the effects of other explanatory variables, variations in liking Adrian Năstase account for 62,5 percent from the variance of the popularity of the alliance he represents. The effect of Traian Băsescu on ADA, even if lower, it is not negligible as the evaluation of his personal characteristics by the voters accounts for 41,4 percent from the variance in liking for the alliance. Voting for PSD+PUR is sensibly more personalized than voting for ADA. It is difficult to say what are the reasons for such a difference but, all together, Adrian Năstase is sensibly more efficient than Traian Băsescu in transferring his popularity (but also his unpopularity) towards his own political party. Amongst the potential explanations of such a phenomenon, purely speculative at this moment, we mention: *higher*

visibility given by the prime-ministerial office, *greater unity of the political alliance* led by Năstase (a large party and an almost invisible one) compared to the one led by Băseșcu (two parties almost equal in voting intentions, divided by historical disagreements), the *dominant position* of PSD in broadcasting media content, as well as the *late nomination* of the PD leader as ADA candidate for the presidential office.

[Table 4 about here]

Secondly, if we look at it in multivariate analyses in relation with other explanatory dimensions (model 6 in Tables 3 and 4; model 3 in Tables 5 and 6), *the evaluation of political leaders is the variable with the highest or second highest explanatory potential* in all the situations. In other words, the popularity of the political leader has a significant influence over the liking capital of the political party or vote intention in both cases.

[Table 5 about here]

Thirdly, the *net or 'pure' effects* of the leader on the party are significant in the case of both competitors disputing victory in the November 2004 general elections. The evaluation of leaders' personal characteristics, if we control for the party identification, retrospective evaluations and socio-demographic characteristics, improves the prediction (ΔR^2) with 16,2 percent (PSD+PUR), respectively 15,2 percent (ADA) in the case of the liking capital of the party. The impact is highly remarkable if we look at it in context of the extreme multidimensionality of motivation of electoral decisions.

[Table 6 about here]

9. GOING FURTHER: WHAT'S BEHIND LEADERS' EVALUATIONS

As we have already seen so far, *leader evaluations* bear a significant impact upon both the liking capital of a party and the vote intention in general elections. However, the way a voter feels about a particular leader is not entirely due to his/her personal personality traits. Thus, a leader's popularity score is also subject to a large variety of influences, such as party closeness, ideological affiliation, performance evaluations, issue positions and so on, that mediate the reception of that particular leader. As a consequence, placing the equals sign

between leader effects and the influence of personal characteristics on voting might not be such a good idea. In order to avoid such a misleading relationship, the next step in our analysis was to measure the *impact leader's personality traits on the sympathy scores* received by the two main contenders in the presidential elections of 2004. This development is possible thanks to a sequence of CPICR items capturing the public perception of Adrian Năstase (PSD+PUR) and Traian Băsescu (ADA) on an extended list of personal characteristics²⁶.

What are the candidate traits expected to have an impact on the sympathy scores? This is not a simple question for sure. In their seminal article, Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk (1986) identified a five-dimensional solution (competence, integrity, reliability, charisma, and a personal dimension) underlying the evaluation of candidates in American presidential elections. A parallel analysis of Kinder (1986) reduces the range of relevant personal characteristics to only four dimensions, namely competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy. Similar conclusions on the evaluative patterns employed by the voters are issued in a wide variety of cultural and historical contexts, such as the United States (Miller and Miller, 1976; Page, 1978; Kinder, Abelson, and Fiske, 1979; Markus, 1982; Kinder, 1983), Germany (Brettschneider and Gabriel, 2002), Canada (Johnston, 2002), Australia and Great Britain (Bean and Mughan, 1989), Russia (Colton, 2000), Romania (Bîrsan and Comşa, 2005; Gheorghiuță, 2009). Although the literature is far from 'a final agreement' on the topic, *competence*, *integrity* and *leadership* are personal traits of the presidential candidates that appear as relevant (in various combinations) in most of the aforementioned studies.

In the light of this relative agreement in the literature, we decided to test the impact of the three dimensions on the sympathy ratings of the two main presidential candidates. Since we are dealing with rather complex patterns of evaluation, the three dimensions were extracted as factor regression scores from the CPICR items. *Competence* includes whether a candidate "is an educated man", whether he "is a true professional in his domain" and has the diplomatic skills for "developing a smooth relationship with the other countries". The *integrity* factor is loaded with being "an honest man" and determined to "fight against corruption". *Leadership* includes whether the candidate knows how to "impose his point of view" and "enforce order and discipline". In addition to the three dimensions mentioned above, we have introduced a by proxy gauge of *empathy*, that looked particularly relevant in

²⁶ The CPICR questionnaire items ask the respondents to evaluate the degree (1-4) to which several traits are characteristic for the two main contenders.

this electoral context²⁷. It combines the candidate's ability to "speak the people's language" and his "sense of humour".

As we have already mentioned, leaders' evaluations are not only about their personal traits. In order to assess the right impact of personal characteristics on the sympathy scores, several other variables that exercise an influence on the candidate perception need to be controlled in the statistical models. On a first level, we expect *party or ideological identification* (closeness to a political party, ideological distance, previous party vote, and so on) to mediate the way presidential candidates are received by the electorate. Except for really flagrant cases, desirable personality traits will always be overstated in case of the favourite's party candidate and understated in case of the main opponent. On a second level, from the voter's point of view, it is rather unlikely to discern between the candidate's character and his performance. It is hard to appreciate the integrity of, let's say, a prime minister when your wage has just gone down ten percent. Thus, variables for *retrospective evaluation of candidate's past performance* (or his/her party's) in office (or of the opponent) cannot be left outside an explanatory model of sympathy scores towards political leaders. Both categories of predictors are measured and used in this analysis similarly to the previous sub-chapter. The significant change in defining the baseline model compared to previous analyses is due to the exclusion of *socio-demographic variables*. It was a rather radical decision, but perfectly explainable in terms of low predictive power and bearing in mind the model's parsimony.

[Table 7 about here]

The resulting OLS regression models are listed in Table 7. In the case of each of the two contenders we estimate three models *predicting sympathy scores* based on candidate traits, alternative explanations, and both. The first model gives a proper estimate of *gross effects* (R^2) of perceived candidate traits on leader evaluations. The second one constitutes actually the baseline model for measuring the *net impact* of personal traits. Thus, a reliable estimation of the 'true' effect of personality factors on sympathy scores will be given by the increase in R^2 (ΔR^2) from the second to the third model. In other words, ΔR^2 should be interpreted as the additional variance in sympathy score explained by the perceived candidate traits, while controlling for party/ideological identification and evaluations of government activity.

²⁷ Adrian Năstase and Traian Băsescu were perceived as two highly antagonistic personalities in relation to the others. While Năstase can easily be described as a distant person, without remarkable communication skills, not trying to pose into "the man next door", Băsescu is perceived as a popular person, with a very natural behaviour and straight discourse.

What are the main findings at this level of our analysis? First, explanatory models are more successful in predicting the popularity scores for the candidate of the governing party than for that of the opposition. Second, perceived candidate traits bear a significant impact upon leader evaluations, gross effects reaching a quite high 0,576 for Adrian Năstase and a lower still significant 0,378 for Traian Băsescu. Third, the traits block brings more to the prediction of leaders' popularity than the 'control block'. Fourth, *competence*, *integrity* and *leadership* always bring a significant contribution in the models, while *empathy* doesn't.

Now let's take a closer look at the extensive models (3s). In the case of Adrian Năstase, acting prime minister, perceived *integrity* has the largest impact ($\beta=+0,281$) on his sympathy capital. Being repeatedly accused by his opponents of patronizing large-scale corruption, the social-democrat candidate is favourably perceived by the share of electorate still confident in his honest political behaviour. *Competence* ($\beta=+0,158$) comes third within the hierarchy of popularity predictors, Năstase's career evolution offering numerous clues on this dimension: successful academic career, MP and head of the lower chamber of the Parliament, foreign affair minister and finally a full mandate of prime-minister. *Leadership* and *empathy* dimensions do not bring notable contributions to the understanding of sympathy or antipathy for the social-democrat leader.

What about the influences of the controlled long-term or medium-term variables? The *party label* seems to score a lot in the formation of Năstase's evaluation. *Declared closeness* to the National Union PSD+PUR (or to its component parties) brings the second most important contribution ($\beta=+0,221$) to the popularity score of the acting prime-minister, while *continuity in voting* for PSD accounts for a +0,109 impact. *Ideological distance* exerts a rather poor influence ($\beta=-0,089$), which is rather understandable if we frame this issue in terms of short democratic continuity, unconsolidated political culture, unclear signals emerging from the political actors. *Government's performance in office* factor brings notable contributions to the explanation only on the *anti-corruption dimension* ($\beta=+0,109$), which confirms the salience of the corruption issue in the 2004 elections, but scores poorly on the *general performance* direction.

For the opposition candidate, Traian Băsescu, the explanatory model looks somehow different, mainly on the level of perceived personal traits. Perceived *competence* ($\beta=0,349$) has by far the largest impact upon his popularity score. It should be emphasized that it still is a candidate trait that has the largest explanatory power, but it's not about integrity as it was in Năstase's case. We should probably look for the origins of such a change in the typical lines of attack dominating the campaign discourse. While Năstase was repeatedly accused of

being corrupt (so, lacking integrity), Bănescu was usually framed as uneducated, unrefined and lacking any diplomatic skills (all this loading the competence factor). Thus, those considering the ADA candidate as being “not enough competent for the job” were more likely to perceive him unfavourably. The second high-impact personal trait is *leadership* ($\beta=+0,122$), that can easily be linked to his past of ship captain, or to his largely accepted image of forth-pushing, determined politician. However, this dimension has only the fifth most important contribution to the explanation of the ADA candidate’s popularity score. *Integrity* and *empathy* don’t bring a notable influence in our regression model.

All the *party/ideology* variables listed contribute significantly to the formation of Traian Bănescu’s popularity scores. In the hierarchy of contributions to the explanatory model, *party identification* scores second ($\beta=+0,205$), *continuity* third ($\beta=+0,153$), and *ideological distance* fourth ($\beta=-0,147$). In this category of explanatory variables ideological distance brings the only change compared to the previous OLS regression model (predicting Adrian Năstase sympathy scores). Thus, ideology seems to matter more in the evaluation of the ADA candidate. Finally, the perception of *government performance* (general or anti-corruption) doesn’t bring much additional explanation ($\beta=-0,062$, respectively $-0,070$) to the popularity score of Traian Bănescu.

What have we learned that far? It looks like their perceived personality traits did bear a significant impact upon the evaluations of the two main presidential candidates and, consequently, upon the results of the 2004 general elections. Even if we control for the party/ideological identification and government performance variables, the candidate personal traits block improves the prediction of the popularity score (ΔR^2) by 16,4% in the case of Adrian Năstase, respectively 18,7% in the case of Traian Bănescu, which is quite remarkable. Party identification issues bring a significant contribution to the understanding of leader’s evaluation mechanisms, larger on the party label dimension and poorer on the ideological one. Government performance variables score rather poorly in the explanatory models, particularly in the case of the opposition candidate. However, as a general observation, the lack of longitudinal data on the topic in the Romanian case demands a significant amount of prudence in performing too bold generalizations.

[Table 8 about here]

Are there any significant variations when replicating the models on subsamples of voters with different levels of political sophistication? Literature has launched rather

contradictory signals on whether or not voters' political sophistication affects the relevance invested in personal traits for evaluating political contenders. Many studies (some of them classical) link relying on candidate's personal qualities to less politically sophisticated voters (Converse, 1964; Miller and Miller, 1976; Popkin and Dimock 1999; Gidengil et al., 2000). However, a significant number of recent empirical studies do cast doubt on this conventional assumption, stating a positive relationship between political sophistication and the use of candidate's character traits in electoral decision-making (Miller, Wattenberg, and Malanchuk, 1986; Bean, 1993; McGraw & Steenbergen, 1995). In order to test this final explanatory path, we made use of a four-question *political knowledge* battery included in the CPICR questionnaire. Although political knowledge reflects only one dimension of the political sophistication concept, we were forced to rely on that for data availability reasons. Based on the answers to the four questions, we divided the sample into three subsamples: low (0-1 right answers), medium (2), and high political knowledge (3-4) subjects.

[Table 9 about here]

The results for the two main contenders are presented in Tables 8 and 9. A clear relationship is rather hard to trace, especially in a context lacking longitudinal data. Several remarks are for sure required. First, the relevance of non-trait explanatory variables (party/ideological identifications, retrospective evaluations) seems to be in a positive relation with political knowledge. In other words, their explanatory power for leaders' popularity scores increases with political sophistication. Still it is not very clear if the relevance of perceived candidate traits follows the reverse trend. In the case of Adrian Năstase, the additional variance in popularity scores explained by his personal traits (ΔR^2) is in a negative relation with political sophistication. But in the case of Traian Băsescu the relationship looks more like following a curvilinear pattern, with people moderately politically sophisticated relying the most on personal traits. Last, the goodness-of-fit statistics for the extensive models (3) increase with political sophistication. Thus, the model performs better in explaining the leaders' evaluations in the case of more politically sophisticated voters.

10. CONCLUSIONS

The present analysis focused on direct electoral effects of political leaders (as a result of their personal characteristics and behaviour) on voting patterns for legislative elections.

In brief, we tried to assess the dynamics and intensity of the personalization of electoral politics in a context defined by unclear expectations, that of post-communist Romania. The analytical strategy used combined the longitudinal analysis of survey data for a period of 12 years, covering 4 electoral cycles, with cross-sectional analysis of data (CPICR) collected for the 2004 legislative elections. Next, we shall briefly overview the main conclusions of this analysis:

(1) The personalization of the voting decision is moderate in the Romanian social and political context, and comparable with the level of personalization from other European democracies. We can identify some variation from one moment of time to another and from one political party to another.

(2) The degree of personalization is ascendant during an electoral cycle and is significantly enhanced in the pre-election period.

(3) The evaluation of the political leader seems to be the most important cognitive shortcut used by Romanian voters for evaluating political parties in pre-election moments.

(4) Voting intention is more personalized for small political parties, lacking governmental experience, than for larger parties or political alliances.

(5) We observe a general tendency of leaders' 'erosion' during the analyzed interval. The general level of confidence in political leaders is in constant decline, positive values for confidence indexes are rare in the last decade.

(6) Mainstream political leaders seem to encounter an unique explosion of popularity during their career, followed by a faster or slower, more or less sinuous, erosion. Spectacular comebacks of political leaders seem highly improbable (even impossible) once the confidence indexes drop sub-zero.

(7) Perceived candidate traits bear a large impact upon leader evaluations. Competence, integrity and leadership always bring a significant contribution to the explanatory models.

(8) The relevance of non-trait explanatory variables (party/ ideological identifications, retrospective evaluations) appears to be in a positive relation with political knowledge.

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Table 1: Market shares for the main TV stations, urban areas (cities) according to AGB Data Research.

Source: Coman, 2003: 111

	TVR 1	TVR 2	ProTV	Antena 1	PrimaTV	AcasăTV	Others
1998	21,2%	5%	35,1%	17,4%	4,8%	4,1%	11,3%
1999	16,5%	3,1%	33,7%	22,5%	4,9%	6,9%	10,2%
2000	15,6%	3,7%	25,4%	21,5%	5,7%	8,4%	16,3%
2001	14,4%	4,3%	21,8%	19,9%	9,7%	9,1%	18,6%
2002	14,5%	3%	21%	17%	7%	8%	

Table 2: *Evolution of the statistical association between confidence in the leaders of the two parties forming ADA (PNL and PD) and the vote intention for the alliance, respectively for the composing parties (Gamma coefficients)*

Data source: POB October 2003-October 2006.

Moment	Political leader	Association with the vote in favour of ADA	Association with support for the party		Difference
October 2003	Traian Băsescu	0,613	PD	0,563	+0,050
	Theodor Stolojan	0,638	PNL	0,609	+0,029
May 2004	Traian Băsescu	0,532	PD	0,490	+0,042
	Theodor Stolojan	0,722	PNL	0,570	+0,152
May 2005	Traian Băsescu	0,587	PD	0,210	+0,377
	Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	0,428	PNL	0,145	+0,283
November 2005	Traian Băsescu	0,625	PD	0,427	+0,198
	Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	<i>0,287</i>	PNL	<i>0,470</i>	<i>-0,183</i>
May 2006	Traian Băsescu	<i>0,488</i>	PD	<i>0,622</i>	<i>-0,134</i>
	Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	<i>0,296</i>	PNL	<i>0,398</i>	<i>-0,102</i>
October 2006	Traian Băsescu	<i>0,485</i>	PD	<i>0,616</i>	<i>-0,131</i>
	Călin Popescu Tăriceanu	<i>0,163</i>	PNL	<i>0,457</i>	<i>-0,294</i>

Table 3: *Explanatory models of voter evaluation of the Social Democrat Party (PSD)**Standardized beta coefficients with standard errors, OLS regression*

Source of data: CPICR, November 2004

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Leader popularity score	***+0,791 (0,03)	▪	▪	▪	▪	***+0,556 (0,06)
Party identification	▪	***+0,353 (0,07)	▪	▪	***+0,299 (0,07)	***+0,093 (0,06)
Ideological distance	▪	*** -0,259 (0,04)	▪	▪	*** -0,195 (0,04)	*** -0,112 (0,03)
Vote in local elections	▪	***+0,268 (0,21)	▪	▪	***+0,220 (0,21)	***+0,109 (0,18)
Government performance	▪	▪	***+0,233 (0,13)	▪	**+0,096 (0,15)	†+0,054 (0,12)
Anti-corruption performance	▪	▪	***+0,318 (0,13)	▪	***+0,226 (0,15)	***+0,115 (0,13)
București (Bucharest)	▪	▪	▪	† -0,059 (0,38)	+0,016 (0,34)	-0,010 (0,28)
Oltenia	▪	▪	▪	*+0,063 (0,29)	+0,019 (0,28)	+0,015 (0,23)
Age	▪	▪	▪	***+0,134 (0,00)	+0,026 (0,00)	0,000 (0,00)
Rural	▪	▪	▪	†+0,060 (0,21)	+0,032 (0,22)	+0,032 (0,18)
Very large urban	▪	▪	▪	† -0,065 (0,28)	+0,001 (0,27)	+0,017 (0,23)
Adjusted R ²	0,625	0,414	0,235	0,044	0,496	0,658

Table 4: *Explanatory models of voter evaluation of the “Justice and Truth” Alliance PNL-PD.**Standardized beta coefficients with standard errors, OLS regression*

Source of data: CPICR, November 2004

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Leader popularity score	***+0,644 (0,04)	▪	▪	▪	▪	***+0,469 (0,06)
Party identification	▪	***+0,320 (0,06)	▪	▪	***+0,301 (0,06)	***+0,154 (0,06)
Ideological distance	▪	*** -0,254 (0,04)	▪	▪	*** -0,245 (0,04)	*** -0,162 (0,04)
Vote in local elections	▪	***+0,201 (0,21)	▪	▪	***+0,190 (0,22)	**+0,102 (0,20)
Government performance	▪	▪	-0,049 (0,13)	▪	† -0,068 (0,14)	-0,033 (0,12)
Anti-corruption performance	▪	▪	*** -0,166 (0,12)	▪	-0,027 (0,14)	+0,003 (0,12)
Dobrogea	▪	▪	▪	▪	-0,015 (0,41)	+0,011 (0,37)
Very large urban	▪	▪	▪	▪	+0,052 (0,19)	+0,028 (0,17)
Adjusted R ²	0,414	0,311	0,037	▪	0,323	0,475

Table 5: *Explanatory models of vote intention for National Union PSD+PUR**B coefficients with standard errors, exp(b), binary logit regression*

Data source: CPICR, November 2004.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (SE)	exp(b)	b (SE)	exp(b)	b (SE)	exp(b)
Leader popularity score	***+1,682 (0,09)	5,374	▪	▪	***+1,056 (0,15)	2,875
Party identification	▪	▪	***+1,268 (0,14)	3,553	***+0,895 (0,15)	2,448
Ideological distance	▪	▪	† -0,117 (0,06)	0,889	-0,009 (0,07)	0,991
Vote in local elections	▪	▪	***+2,695 (0,30)	14,807	***+2,313 (0,35)	10,106
Government performance	▪	▪	-0,047 (0,24)	0,955	-0,174 (0,27)	0,840
Anti-corruption performance	▪	▪	***+1,152 (0,24)	3,164	***+0,872 (0,27)	2,392
București (Bucharest)	▪	▪	-0,883 (0,58)	0,413	-0,690 (0,66)	0,501
Oltenia	▪	▪	+0,655 (0,43)	1,926	+0,800 (0,49)	2,227
Age	▪	▪	†+0,016 (0,00)	1,016	+0,010 (0,01)	1,010
Rural	▪	▪	+0,084 (0,35)	1,088	+0,050 (0,40)	1,051
Very large urban	▪	▪	* -0,983 (0,46)	0,374	† -0,949 (0,52)	0,387
-2LL	719,080		322,530		252,898	
R ² Cox and Schnell	0,505		0,559		0,608	
R ² Nagelkerke	0,675		0,746		0,812	

Table 6: *Explanatory models of vote intention for the 'Truth and Justice' Alliance PNL-PD*

B coefficients with standard errors, exp(b), binary logit regression.

Data source: CPICR, November 2004.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	b (SE)	exp(b)	b (SE)	exp(b)	b (SE)	exp(b)
Leader popularity score	***+1,389 (0,08)	4,012	▪	▪	***+0,756 (0,12)	2,129
Party identification	▪	▪	***+0,846 (0,10)	2,330	***+0,646 (0,10)	1,908
Ideological distance	▪	▪	** -0,230 (0,07)	0,795	* -0,171 (0,08)	0,842
Vote in local elections	▪	▪	***+2,101 (0,27)	8,174	***+1,894 (0,30)	6,648
Government performance	▪	▪	-0,248 (0,19)	0,781	-0,075 (0,21)	0,928
Anti-corruption performance	▪	▪	*** -0,793 (0,21)	0,452	*** -0,719 (0,22)	0,487
Dobrogea	▪	▪	+0,129 (0,58)	1,138	+0,755 (0,65)	2,127
Very large urban	▪	▪	*+0,633 (0,27)	1,883	+0,456 (0,29)	1,579
-2LL	891,256		382,270		334,671	
R ² Cox and Schnell	0,381		0,486		0,526	
R ² Nagelkerke	0,520		0,657		0,710	

Table 7: *Determinants of popularity scores for Adrian Năstase (PSD+PUR) and Traian Băsescu (ADA).*

Standardized beta coefficients with standard errors, OLS regression

Source of data: CPICR, November 2004

	Adrian Năstase (PSD+PUR)			Traian Băsescu (ADA)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party identification	▪	***+0,355 (0,03)	***+0,221 (0,03)	▪	***+0,317 (0,03)	***+0,205 (0,03)
Ideological distance	▪	*** -0,171 (0,01)	** -0,089 (0,01)	▪	*** -0,188 (0,02)	*** -0,147 (0,02)
Vote in local elections	▪	***+0,202 (0,09)	***+0,113 (0,09)	▪	***+0,185 (0,11)	***+0,153 (0,11)
Government performance	▪	**+0,092 (0,06)	+0,036 (0,06)	▪	* -0,093 (0,07)	† -0,062 (0,07)
Anti-corruption performance	▪	***+0,188 (0,06)	***+0,109 (0,06)	▪	† -0,076 (0,07)	† -0,070 (0,07)
Competence	***+0,233 (0,05)	▪	***+0,158 (0,06)	***+0,439 (0,06)	▪	***+0,349 (0,07)
Integrity	***+0,517 (0,05)	▪	***+0,281 (0,07)	**+0,092 (0,06)	▪	+0,045 (0,07)
Empathy	+0,022 (0,05)	▪	+0,032 (0,06)	-0,014 (0,05)	▪	-0,060 (0,06)
Leadership	†+0,060 (0,05)	▪	†+0,074 (0,06)	***+0,152 (0,05)	▪	**+0,122 (0,07)
Adjusted R ²	0,576	0,478	0,642	0,378	0,322	0,509

Table 8: *Determinants of popularity scores for Adrian Năstase (PSD+PUR) and political knowledge*

Standardized beta coefficients with standard errors, OLS regression

Source of data: CPICR, November 2004

	Low political knowledge			Medium political knowledge			High political knowledge		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party identification	▪	***+0,338 (0,05)	***+0,178 (0,05)	▪	***+0,344 (0,06)	***+0,275 (0,06)	▪	***+0,429 (0,05)	***+0,291 (0,05)
Ideological distance	▪	** -0,142 (0,03)	-0,062 (0,03)	▪	*** -0,195 (0,03)	* -0,128 (0,03)	▪	** -0,143 (0,03)	-0,067 (0,03)
Vote in local elections	▪	***+0,250 (0,15)	*+0,115 (0,15)	▪	***+0,212 (0,17)	*+0,139 (0,18)	▪	*+0,134 (0,17)	+0,058 (0,17)
Government performance	▪	†+0,099 (0,12)	-0,012 (0,11)	▪	+0,096 (0,12)	†+0,107 (0,12)	▪	†+0,106 (0,11)	+0,044 (0,10)
Anti-corruption performance	▪	**+0,169 (0,11)	*+0,130 (0,11)	▪	*+0,148 (0,13)	+0,098 (0,13)	▪	***+0,209 (0,11)	†+0,098 (0,11)
Competence	***+0,179 (0,07)	▪	+0,076 (0,11)	***+0,327 (0,09)	▪	***+0,267 (0,11)	***+0,236 (0,09)	▪	**+0,170 (0,10)
Integrity	***+0,548 (0,07)	▪	***+0,294 (0,13)	***+0,377 (0,12)	▪	+0,096 (0,15)	***+0,543 (0,10)	▪	***+0,364 (0,12)
Empathy	+0,014 (0,07)	▪	+0,090 (0,11)	-0,049 (0,10)	▪	-0,067 (0,12)	+0,108 (0,11)	▪	+0,032 (0,11)
Leadership	*+0,107 (0,08)	▪	*+0,159 (0,12)	†+0,126 (0,10)	▪	†+0,151 (0,11)	-0,046 (0,09)	▪	-0,051 (0,09)
Adjusted R ²	0,612	0,412	0,609	0,489	0,438	0,619	0,591	0,587	0,707
ΔR ² Adjusted			0,197			0,181			0,120

Table 9: *Determinants of popularity scores for Traian Băsescu (ADA) and political knowledge*

Standardized beta coefficients with standard errors, OLS regression

Source of data: CPICR, November 2004

	Low political knowledge			Medium political knowledge			High political knowledge		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party identification	▪	***+0,315 (0,06)	**+0,163 (0,07)	▪	***+0,348 (0,05)	***+0,291 (0,06)	▪	***+0,299 (0,06)	**+0,185 (0,06)
Ideological distance	▪	*** -0,236 (0,03)	** -0,172 (0,03)	▪	** -0,178 (0,04)	* -0,135 (0,04)	▪	* -0,129 (0,04)	* -0,125 (0,04)
Vote in local elections	▪	**+0,150 (0,19)	**+0,162 (0,20)	▪	***+0,220 (0,18)	*+0,130 (0,18)	▪	**+0,201 (0,20)	*+0,148 (0,20)
Government performance	▪	-0,076 (0,13)	-0,090 (0,14)	▪	-0,075 (0,13)	-0,055 (0,12)	▪	* -0,134 (0,12)	-0,049 (0,11)
Anti-corruption performance	▪	-0,077 (0,12)	+0,009 (0,13)	▪	-0,024 (0,13)	+0,015 (0,13)	▪	* -0,159 (0,12)	*** -0,211 (0,11)
Competence	***+0,460 (0,10)	▪	***+0,346 (0,14)	***+0,384 (0,11)	▪	***+0,333 (0,13)	***+0,452 (0,12)	▪	***+0,327 (0,13)
Integrity	+0,069 (0,10)	▪	+0,093 (0,14)	**+0,243 (0,10)	▪	†+0,157 (0,12)	-0,006 (0,11)	▪	-0,036 (0,12)
Empathy	-0,024 (0,08)	▪	-0,117 (0,12)	+0,036 (0,09)	▪	-0,055 (0,12)	-0,078 (0,12)	▪	+0,011 (0,12)
Leadership	**+0,161 (0,08)	▪	+0,137 (0,13)	+0,032 (0,09)	▪	+0,049 (0,12)	**+0,269 (0,12)	▪	†+0,149 (0,13)
Adjusted R ²	0,381	0,261	0,444	0,392	0,316	0,521	0,345	0,384	0,548
ΔR ² Adjusted			0,183			0,205			0,164

Figure 1: *Defining expectations regarding the personalization of voting decisions in Romania.*

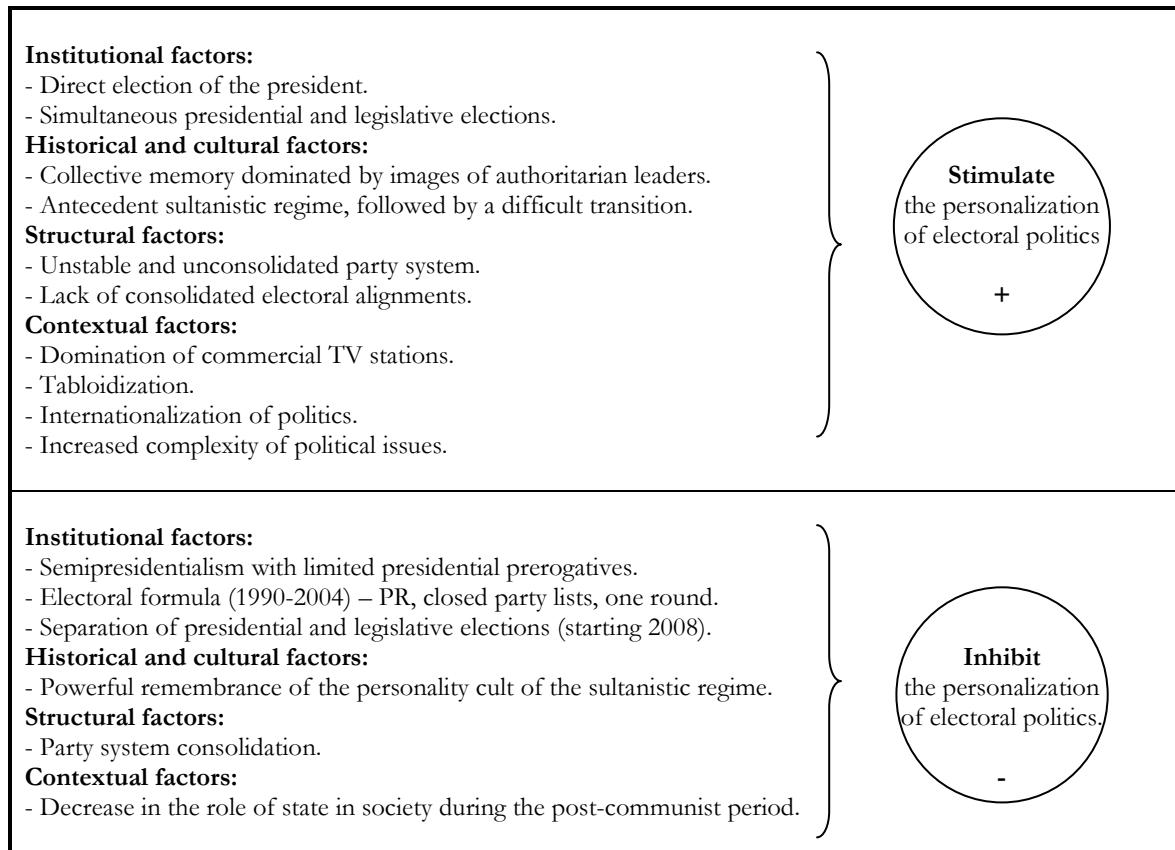


Figure 2: *Evolution of confidence in the main political leaders, 1995-2006*

Data source: POB 1995-2006.

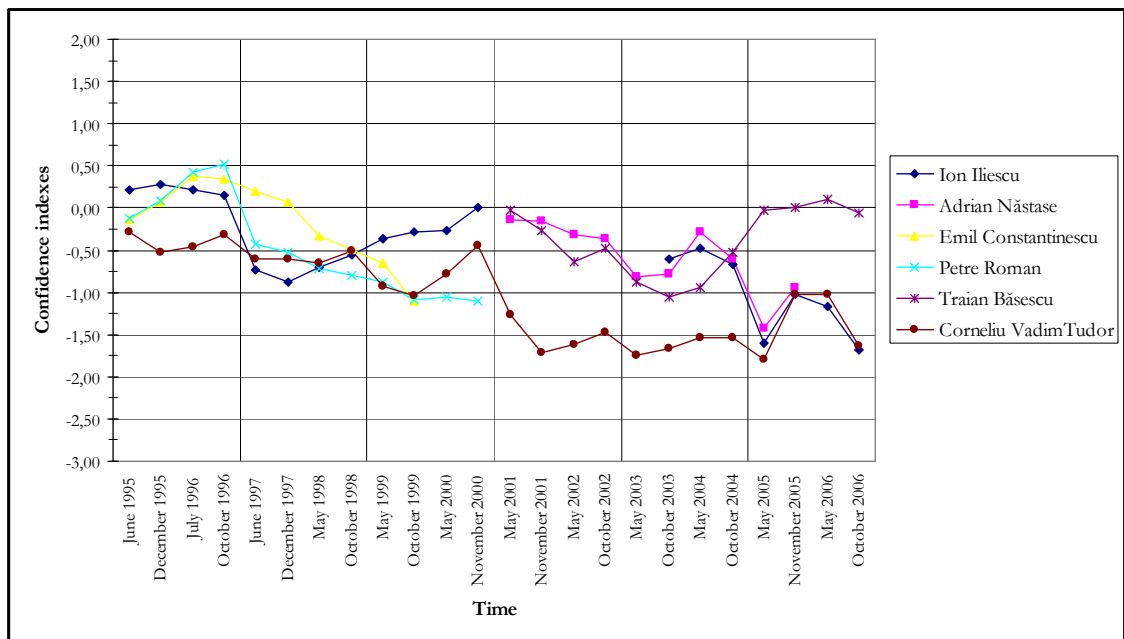
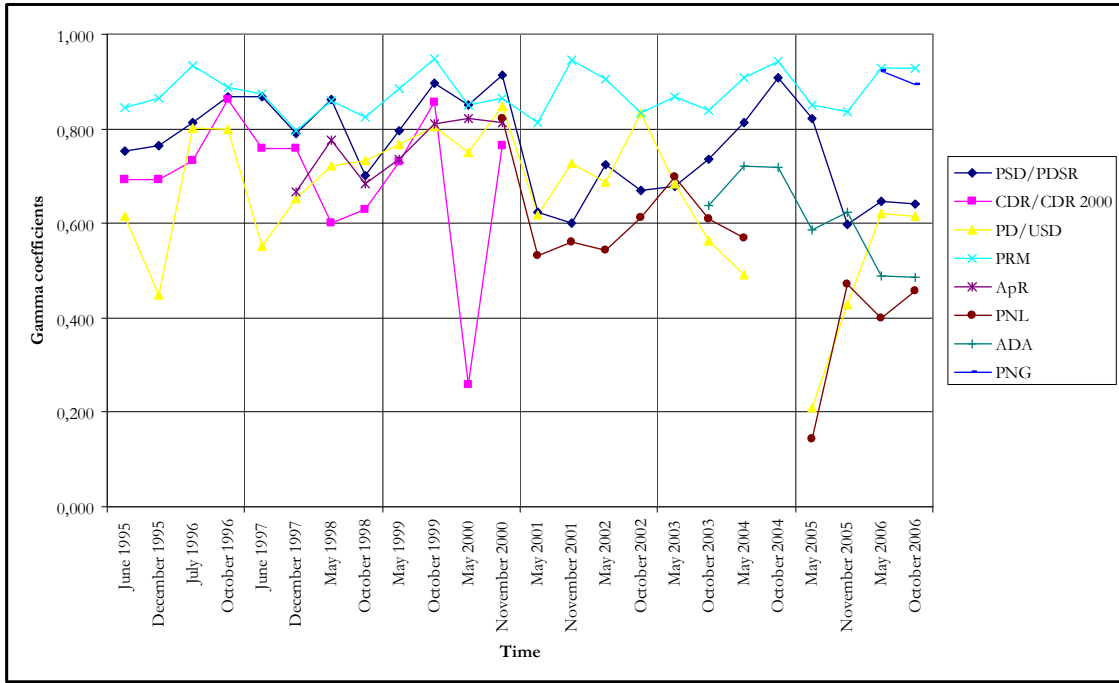


Figure 3: Evolution of leadership effects on vote intention for legislative elections, 1995-2006

Statistical association between confidence in the main political leaders and vote intention for their parties. Gamma coefficients

Data source: POB 1995-2006.



Appendix 1: *Explanatory variables controlled for in the regression models.* Data source: CPICR.

Dimension	Variables	Values	Construction
A. Party identification	A1. Closeness to political party	Score (0, 6)	The CPICR questionnaire uses a filter question – “Please tell me whether there is a political party you feel close to?”. This is followed by the “Which political party?” question, which gives the respondent the possibility to name up to three political parties. The closeness to a political party score is built as follows: 3 points if the political party or alliance is the first option, 2 points if it is the second option or 1 point if it is the last option. The closeness to a political party score varies from 0 (if the political party or alliance is not mentioned at all) to 6 (if an alliance is mentioned as such and two of the member parties are also mentioned). For example, if a respondent lists first ADA, then PNL, and then PD, his closeness to ADA score will be 3+2+1=6.
	A2. Ideological distance	Distance (0, 10)	The CPICR questionnaire asks respondents to place themselves on a 0 to 10 left-right axis and to place political parties on the same axis. Ideological distance is calculated as a difference (module, positive) between the self-placement score and the score corresponding to the ideological placement attributed by the respondent to the respective political party. The smaller the ideological distance (difference), the higher the probability of voting for the respective political party.
	A3. Voting, last local elections	Dichotomy 0, 1	The answer to the closed question: “To which party belonged the candidate you voted for in the last local elections?” was dichotomized as follows: 1=voting for party X and 0=voting for any other party.
B. Retrospective evaluation	B1. Perception of government’s general performance	Score (1, 4)	Measured by the closed question: “Please think of the general government performance, how good or how bad do you think it was in the past 4 years?”. The answer categories were recoded as follows: 1=very bad, 2=bad, 3=good, 4=very good. Please note that this indicator measures the performance of the Adrian Năstase PSD government (2000-2004), which also included PUR ministers during the first three years in office.
	B2. Perception of government performance in fighting corruption	Score (1, 4)	Measured by the closed question: “How do you think the current government performed in fighting corruption?”. Answer categories were recoded as follows: 1=very bad, 2=bad, 3=good, 4=very good. Please note that this indicator measures the performance of the Adrian Năstase PSD government (2000-2004).
C. Socio-demographic characteristics	C1. Age	18 - 102	Years old.
	C2. Historical region	Dichotomy 0, 1	Categories: Transilvania, Crișana-Maramureș, Banat, Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea, Moldova, București. For each region we built dichotomical variables, 1 = the individual lives in the Y region and 0=the individual lives in any other region.
	C3. Residence	Dichotomy 0, 1	Categories: large city, over 200.000 inhabitants; city, 100-200.000 inhabitants; town, 30-100.000 inhabitants; very small town, under 30.000 inhabitants; village, capital of a commune (rural municipality); village. For each category we built dichotomical variables, 1= the individual lives in the Z area of residence and 0= the individual lives in any other area of residence.

Appendix 2: Confidence indexes for the main political leaders, 1995-2006

Period	Political parties								Electoral cycle
	PDSR/PSD/ PSD+PUR	CDR/CDR 2000	PD/USD	PRM	PNL	ApR	ADA	PNG	
March 1995	Iliescu +0,400	Constantinescu -0,001	Roman +0,036	Tudor -0,270	*	*	*	*	a
June 1995	Iliescu +0,210	Constantinescu -0,140	Roman -0,130	Tudor -0,280	*	*	*	*	a
September 1995	Iliescu +0,350	Constantinescu +0,059	Roman +0,058	Tudor -0,330	*	*	*	*	a
December 1995	Iliescu +0,280	Constantinescu +0,071	Roman +0,083	Tudor -0,520	*	*	*	*	a
July 1996	Iliescu +0,220	Constantinescu +0,380	Roman +0,430	Tudor -0,460	*	*	*	*	a
October 1996	Iliescu +0,150	Constantinescu +0,350	Roman +0,520	Tudor -0,310	*	*	*	*	a
Elections									
March 1997	Iliescu -0,356	Constantinescu +0,260	Roman -0,343	Tudor -0,438	*	Meleşcanu +0,080	*	*	b
June 1997	Iliescu -0,743	Constantinescu +0,197	Roman -0,432	Tudor -0,613	*	Meleşcanu +0,205	*	*	b
September 1997	Iliescu -0,526	Constantinescu +0,114	Roman -0,406	Tudor -0,389	*	Meleşcanu -0,043	*	*	b
December 1997	Iliescu -0,874	Constantinescu +0,066	Roman -0,532	Tudor -0,610	*	Meleşcanu -0,094	*	*	b
May 1998	Iliescu -0,703	Constantinescu -0,326	Roman -0,710	Tudor -0,659	*	Meleşcanu -0,195	*	*	b
October 1998	Iliescu -0,551	Constantinescu -0,486	Roman -0,785	Tudor -0,498	*	Meleşcanu -0,237	*	*	b
May 1999	Iliescu -0,366	Constantinescu -0,662	Roman -0,866	Tudor -0,924	*	Meleşcanu -0,126	*	*	b

October 1999	Iliescu	Constantinescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	-0,286	-1,111	-1,091	-1,037	*	-0,314	*	*	
May 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	-0,272	-0,133	-1,051	-0,778	*	-0,333	*	*	
November 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	Stolojan	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	-0,003	-0,349	-1,109	-0,435	-0,438	-0,967	*	*	
Elections									
May 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	-0,135	*	-0,022	-1,273	-1,812	?	*	*	
November 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	-0,154	*	-0,273	-1,723	-1,701	?	*	*	
May 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	-0,310	*	-0,630	-1,620	-1,780	?	*	*	
October 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	-0,360	*	-0,470	-1,480	-0,530	*	*	*	
May 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	-0,810	*	-0,880	-1,750	-0,910	*	*	*	
October 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	-0,780	*	-1,050	-1,660	-0,890	*	-0,890/-1,050	*	
May 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	-0,280	*	-0,940	-1,530	-0,750	*	-0,750/-0,940	*	
October 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	-0,610	*	-0,530	-1,540	-0,460	*	-0,460/-0,530	*	
Elections									
May 2005	Năstase	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	-1,420	*	-0,020/-1,170	-1,790	-0,680	*	-0,680/-0,020	*	
November 2005	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	-0,710	*	+0,001/-0,960	-1,030	-0,780	*	-0,780/+0,001	*	
May 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	-0,940	*	+0,110/-1,080	-1,030	-0,970	*	-0,970/+0,110	-0,810	
October 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	-1,300	*	-0,050/-1,580	-1,640	-1,460	*	-1,460/-0,050	-1,020	

Appendix 3: Association between confidence in political leaders and vote intention in favour of their parties (Gamma coefficients), 1995-2006.

Period	Political parties								Electoral cycle
	PDSR/PSD/ PSD+PUR	CDR/CDR 2000	PD/USD	PRM	PNL	ApR	ADA	PNG	
March 1995	Iliescu 0,647	Constantinescu 0,628	Roman 0,483	Tudor 0,849	*	*	*	*	a
June 1995	Iliescu 0,752	Constantinescu 0,693	Roman 0,615	Tudor 0,845	*	*	*	*	a
September 1995	Iliescu 0,717	Constantinescu 0,703	Roman 0,504	Tudor 0,833	*	*	*	*	a
December 1995	Iliescu 0,765	Constantinescu 0,693	Roman 0,448	Tudor 0,865	*	*	*	*	a
July 1996	Iliescu 0,814	Constantinescu 0,733	Roman 0,801	Tudor 0,935	*	*	*	*	a
October 1996	Iliescu 0,867	Constantinescu 0,863	Roman 0,799	Tudor 0,889	*	*	*	*	a
Elections									
March 1997	Iliescu 0,793	Constantinescu 0,750	Roman 0,527	Tudor 0,773	*	Meleşcanu *	*	*	b
June 1997	Iliescu 0,867	Constantinescu 0,760	Roman 0,553	Tudor 0,874	*	Meleşcanu *	*	*	b
September 1997	Iliescu 0,731	Constantinescu 0,676	Roman 0,472	Tudor 0,813	*	Meleşcanu 0,600	*	*	b
December 1997	Iliescu 0,790	Constantinescu 0,758	Roman 0,653	Tudor 0,795	*	Meleşcanu 0,666	*	*	b
May 1998	Iliescu 0,862	Constantinescu 0,600	Roman 0,721	Tudor 0,859	*	Meleşcanu 0,777	*	*	b
October 1998	Iliescu 0,702	Constantinescu 0,628	Roman 0,733	Tudor 0,825	*	Meleşcanu 0,685	*	*	b
May 1999	Iliescu 0,797	Constantinescu 0,731	Roman 0,768	Tudor 0,884	*	Meleşcanu 0,737	*	*	b

October 1999	Iliescu	Constantinescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,896	0,857	0,806	0,947	*	0,809	*	*	
May 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,852	0,260	0,751	0,851	*	0,823	*	*	
November 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	Stolojan	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,915	0,765	0,847	0,864	0,823	0,814	*	*	
Elections									
May 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,624	*	0,618	0,813	0,531	?	*	*	
November 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,602	*	0,728	0,945	0,560	?	*	*	
May 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,723	*	0,688	0,905	0,543	?	*	*	
October 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	0,669	*	0,832	0,832	0,613	*	*	*	
May 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	0,677	*	0,684	0,869	0,698	*	*	*	
October 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,737	*	0,563	0,840	0,609	*	0,638/0,613	*	
May 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,813	*	0,490	0,909	0,570	*	0,722/0,532	*	
October 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,909	*	?	0,942	?	*	0,762/0,718	*	
Elections									
May 2005	Năstase	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	0,822	*	0,210/0,246	0,852	0,145	*	0,428/0,587	*	
November 2005	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	0,598	*	0,427/0,282	0,835	0,470	*	0,287/0,625	*	
May 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	0,646	*	0,622/0,125	0,928	0,398	*	0,296/0,488	0,921	
October 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	0,642	*	0,616/0,321	0,927	0,457	*	0,163/0,485	0,893	

Appendix 4: *Association between confidence in political leaders and vote intention in favour of their parties (contingency coefficients), 1995-2006.*

Period	Political parties								Electoral cycle
	PDSR/PSD/ PSD+PUR	CDR/CDR 2000	PD/USD	PRM	PNL	ApR	ADA	PNG	
March 1995	Iliescu 0,375	Constantinescu 0,324	Roman 0,224	Tudor 0,363	*	*	*	*	a
June 1995	Iliescu 0,434	Constantinescu 0,418	Roman 0,261	Tudor 0,449	*	*	*	*	a
September 1995	Iliescu 0,426	Constantinescu 0,375	Roman 0,211	Tudor 0,300	*	*	*	*	a
December 1995	Iliescu 0,436	Constantinescu 0,425	Roman 0,171	Tudor 0,403	*	*	*	*	a
July 1996	Iliescu 0,467	Constantinescu 0,407	Roman 0,401	Tudor 0,370	*	*	*	*	a
October 1996	Iliescu 0,490	Constantinescu 0,483	Roman 0,416	Tudor 0,391	*	*	*	*	a
Elections									
March 1997	Iliescu 0,486	Constantinescu 0,491	Roman 0,211	Tudor 0,286	*	Meleşcanu *	*	*	b
June 1997	Iliescu 0,527	Constantinescu 0,488	Roman 0,212	Tudor 0,442	*	Meleşcanu *	*	*	b
September 1997	Iliescu 0,447	Constantinescu 0,415	Roman 0,164	Tudor 0,375	*	Meleşcanu 0,155	*	*	b
December 1997	Iliescu 0,467	Constantinescu 0,473	Roman 0,299	Tudor 0,421	*	Meleşcanu 0,259	*	*	b
May 1998	Iliescu 0,519	Constantinescu 0,373	Roman 0,356	Tudor 0,459	*	Meleşcanu 0,317	*	*	b
October 1998	Iliescu 0,422	Constantinescu 0,380	Roman 0,371	Tudor 0,452	*	Meleşcanu 0,226	*	*	b
May 1999	Iliescu 0,517	Constantinescu 0,441	Roman 0,348	Tudor 0,447	*	Meleşcanu 0,348	*	*	b

October 1999	Iliescu	Constantinescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,590	0,528	0,450	0,557	*	0,412	*	*	
May 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	*	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,552	0,108	0,275	0,443	*	0,405	*	*	
November 2000	Iliescu	Isărescu	Roman	Tudor	Stolojan	Meleşcanu	*	*	b
	0,603	0,333	0,427	0,493	0,429	0,507	*	*	
Elections									
May 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,395	*	0,246	0,472	0,223	?	*	*	
November 2001	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,410	*	0,315	0,569	0,267	?	*	*	
May 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stoica	Meleşcanu	*	*	c
	0,464	*	0,340	0,340	0,202	?	*	*	
October 2002	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	0,430	*	0,366	0,366	0,284	*	*	*	
May 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	*	*	c
	0,444	*	0,332	0,533	0,395	*	*	*	
October 2003	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,474	*	0,235	0,540	0,285	*	0,308/0,302	*	
May 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,533	*	0,162	0,541	0,267	*	0,312/0,203	*	
October 2004	Năstase	*	Bănescu	Tudor	Stolojan	*	Stolojan/Bănescu	*	c
	0,596	*	?	0,580	?	*	0,501/0,461	*	
Elections									
May 2005	Năstase	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	0,508	*	0,082/0,101	0,449	0,054	*	0,285/0,379	*	
November 2005	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	*	d
	0,365	*	0,172/0,126	0,467	0,193	*	0,171/0,368	*	
May 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	0,372	*	0,304/0,117	0,548	0,202	*	0,163/0,251	0,434	
October 2006	Geoană	*	Bănescu/Boc	Tudor	Tăriceanu	*	Tăriceanu/Bănescu	Becali	d
	0,387	*	0,307/0,209	0,578	0,203	*	0,123/0,289	0,424	