

POLITICAL CLEAVAGES AND PARTY SYSTEM DYNAMICS IN ROMANIA IN THE LAST DECADES

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Abstract

Political cleavages have shaped the development of the political parties in Romania since 1989. Due to the speed of transition, several types of political cleavages occurred, affecting to a large extent the dynamics of the political parties. The article aims to analyse all these political cleavages, as well as their influence on parties and on the party system.

Keywords: Romania, political cleavages, European Union, postcommunism, political parties.

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Introduction

After almost four decades of democratic development in Romania, both political institutions and the party system stabilised, for the benefit of governing but also of the researchers. Among the first steps taken after the 1989 Revolutions were the establishment of political parties and the plan to organise, as soon as possible, free and fair elections. Due to more than forty years of totalitarian regime, with a significant freezing of all social or economic conflicts, the first parties that appeared were top to the bottom parties or parties based on different personalities. There were 80 parties having lists at the 1990 parliamentary elections, with 27 of them entering the Chamber of Deputies (with lighter rules than the Senate).¹ Soon, the first signs of political cleavages and specific social support for different parties occurred. Just two years later, at the 1992 parliamentary (and first local elections) some sort of electoral and social attachment were noticeable in the case of party competition.

The article aims to analyse the development of the Romanian parties and party system and their connection with the electoral support, mainly based on political cleavages. Also, the text has as an objective the research of the development of political cleavages, being them a support for particular political ideologies and public policies. Eventually, we summarise by describing the cleavage-based voting of the nowadays Romanian political parties.

Political parties and party system dynamics are important indicators of every democracy. The above statement is even more profound when it comes to the democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, more precisely the former communist states. Lacking a democratic cultural base, many parties have slipped into a grey area, and if they were in government, they influenced government policies in the same direction. For a better understanding of the positioning of parties on various issues, we will analyse them using cleavage theory.

We shall take into consideration three sets of political cleavages. Even though they were designed for other regions and historical times, the political cleavages proposed by Lipset and Rokkan display a great resilience, and in a form or another, they can still be identified in Central and Eastern

¹ [https://www.roaep.ro/alegeri_1990/wp-content/uploads/81-82.pdf], accessed 22 May 2024

Europe. The second set comes from a particularity of the region, that is of former communist countries. Thus, the so-called post-communist divides will be employed for our analysis. Thirdly, political cleavages that occurred due to recent economic and social processes will be taken into consideration; postmaterialism and European integration can be added to the list, with the political cleavages they generated.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used. Policy and discourse analysis is a tool that shows how parties or party leaders adopt outside-the-box views, that is while a party belongs to a certain party family, it may employ opposite values. Comparative analysis will be employed to compare different parties positioning. In the end, political parties will be placed in a chart, according to their positions and based on the political cleavages that influence them.

On the other hand, some data will be used, provided by two extensive studies. First of all, the Chapel Hill Expert Survey will deliver several data regarding the national party positioning on European integration and other issues.² Secondly, we use a set of data based on a particularity of the Romanian politics. The main communication tool of the Romanian political parties and of political leaders has been, in the last decade, Facebook. It was not until 2024 when TikTok has also become a favourite communication device. The recent years are covered with sufficient data offered by a study that covers the period 2019 to 2021 with information from 234 political parties' Facebook pages.³

Chronologically, we identify two periods of development of the Romanian party system: the period from 1990 to 2008, followed by the period from 2009 to the present, both of which have two sets of cleavage theories attached to them to explain the mutations within the party system. The year

² Seth Jolly, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, Milada Anna Vachudova, "Chapel Hill Expert Survey trend file, 1999–2019", *Electoral Studies*, Volume 75, 2022, [<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379421001323?via%3Dihub>], accessed 14 March 2024

³ Francisco Caravaca, José González-Cabañas, Ángel Cuevas & Rubén Cuevas., Estimating ideology and polarization in European countries using Facebook data, *EPJ Data Science*, volume 11, 2022, [<https://epjdatascience.springeropen.com/articles/10.1140/epjds/s13688-022-00367-1>], accessed 15 May 2024; also, data on [<https://eupoliticalbarometer.uc3m.es/dashboard/country/Romania>].

2008 seems to be appropriate since there were organised the first local and parliamentary elections after entering the European Union and they were also the only parliamentary and local elections not to be won by PSD, as an individual party.

Development of political cleavages

Compared to the parties in Western Europe, the ones in Central and Eastern Europe had to go through the weaknesses provided by the communist regime. If the cleavages proposed by Rokkan were also present in the Eastern space before the 1940s, all these conflicts, cleavage lines and the parties generated were cancelled by the one-party regimes and the social levelling induced by the communists.

Romania entered the transition with some particularities, beyond its geographical localization and the fact that it was part of the communist region dominated by the USSR. One of the few Orthodox countries in the communist East-European area, the only Latin country, belonging to two or even three cultural spaces (namely the Hungarian-Austrian, Turkish and Russian), there were all elements that made Romania distinct in the group of Central and Eastern European countries that had emerged from communism.

During communism, even some divides succeeded to survive, they could not generate political parties and political conflicts, since all parties were banned, except the communist ones and the elections under strict supervision. After the fall of communism, political cleavages proved to be more and more influential, since they shape party competition. Similarly, political parties can shape the societal conflicts, influencing, to a certain extent, political cleavages, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).⁴ That was not the case after 1947-1948 until 1990.

The Traditional Cleavages

The cleavages described by Lipset and Rokkan, quoted in the literature as the traditional cleavages, had as their starting point the national

⁴ Zsolt Enyedi, "The role of agency in cleavage formation", *European Journal of Political Research*, 44, 2005, pp. 697-720.

and industrial revolutions ("critical junctures").⁵ The two produced a series of cultural, economic and territorial conflicts, which led to the emergence of a multitude of parties in each (western) European national space.

The four cleavages proposed by Lipset and Rokkan are arranged in a two-two pair, on a cultural (territorial) axis, state-church and centre-periphery, and on an economic axis, rural-urban and owners-workers.

Except for the state-church cleavage, which was more specific to Catholic and partly Protestant countries, but less so to Orthodox ones, the other three had a certain impact on the social structuring and support for the parties in the period before 1945. The National Peasant Party (PNȚ, after 1989, PNȚCD, National Peasant Party Christian Democrat) was an organisation to a good extent attached to the rural space, but it also had a regionalist dimension. In opposition, the National Liberal Party (PNL) had an urbanist dimension and was close to the wealthy bourgeoisie and merchants. Previously, the Conservative Party and its various factions also originated in rural and partly regional areas. In the absence of consistent industry, the owners-workers cleavage was a shallow one, generating an anaemic left.

However, in the absence of a consolidated democracy with genuinely free and fair elections, the party system failed to structure itself around social cleavages. On the other hand, the role of cleavages was precisely to form a pair of camps around a conflict, camps that would intensely support different parties. The curious electoral system in Romania and the ability of different authorities to intervene in the voting process led to an increase in electoral volatility and to an endless process of fractionalization or merging of parties, often grouped around personalities and less reflecting the problems of the voters.

The implementation of universal suffrage in 1919 did not resolve this trend. The only notable element was the disappearance of the Conservative Party, replaced as a major electoral force by the PNȚ.⁶ Yet, fractionalization has not disappeared, and volatility remained present.

⁵ S.M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan, "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction", in: S.M. Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.), *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York and London: The Free Press-Collier-Macmillan, 1967, pp. 1-64.

⁶ Starting with 1921, a land reform took place, which eventually led to the diminishing of landlords' influence. In the same time, the electoral reform allowed all mature males to vote, which led, in the rural area, to increase in influence of agrarian parties.

The occupation of the country by Soviet troops and the empowering of the communist regime in 1947-1948 obviously led to the "freezing" of these cleavages for more than four decades.⁷ The communist authorities transformed the society into a huge laboratory, cancelling centuries of economic and social developments. The nationalization of all factories and other means of production, the cooperativization of agriculture, which meant the confiscation of agricultural land that had just been distributed to peasants, or forced industrialization, followed by massive urbanization, not least the abolition of many religious denominations and the move of the Orthodox Church to a backstage were just some of the causes that affected the social body. On the political front, all parties were banned, and electoral competition came under strict communist control. Under these circumstances, the various cultural or economic conflicts that generate political camps (cleavages) were completely cancelled or drastically attenuated. Even after democracy was restored in 1989, the pre-war socio-economic features could not be reestablished, yet certain conflicts resurfaced sooner or later, generating multiple political parties.

Several social and economic processes took place in Romania during the 1990s, the post-communist period. To name just some:

a. privatisations, which led to the emergence of entrepreneurs, transformed later into a group of owners, and also into a group of workers, which eventually led to a class cleavage.

b. democratisation, which brought new political developments, yet also a series of freedoms, that annoyed the conservative section of these post-communist societies.

c. integration in the European Union, which put further pressures on the people living in Central and Eastern Europe.

d. economic development, somehow similar to the one taking place in the 1950s-1960s in Western Europe, leading to the emergence of post-materialists.

e. globalisation, with both economic and cultural effects.

All these post-1989 developments, having as ground mainly communist mentalities, led to particular situations in all CEE countries. On the other hand, political/social/economic changes that took place, in Western Europe for more than a century (see, for instance, industrialisation or the emergence of post-materialism), had to happen in less than three decades.

⁷ This *freezing* term mis used by Rokkan, having a different meaning.

Although after decades of modernization, the countryside remained rather undeveloped, therefore, a **rural-urban** cleavage quickly (re)emerged. Contrary to the initial theory, which indicated an economic conflict, in post-communist Romania the cleavage revealed itself and is seen more as a cultural one, describing different ways of life or attitudes rather than economic conflicts between farmers and simple rural and urban people. The main recipient of rural support and votes has been PSD and its predecessors. All local elections were won by this party, if we are to use the number of winning mayors as an indicator.⁸ A simple analysis of the results of the local elections shows that most of these seats were won in the rural areas, where the bulk of the votes for the County Councils come from.

Rather curiously, and as a basic proof that communism affected consistently the society, Romania's former major agrarian party, PNTCD, had little electoral success in rural areas, rather popular in urban areas, being the first dominant party. In fact, the urban area became a favourite non-PSD zone, serving as a major vote source to PNTCD, PNL, PD/PDL, then PNL again.

As a preliminary conclusion, we can state that this political cleavage is a founding and influential one of the Romanian party system.

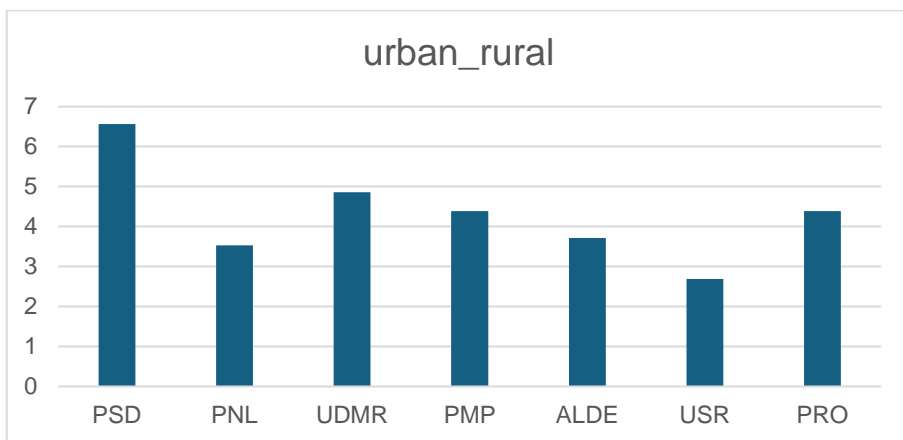


Figure 1. Rural-urban divide in Romania.

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

⁸ 1362 mayorships in 2020, more than 100 more than the PNL; to this total must be added the several dozens of seats obtained in temporary alliances, generically called "Alliance for the name of the locality". In 2016, PSD won around 1700 mayorships, with while local elections being organized in 3180 municipalities.

In the graph, the lowest the figure, the strongest support for urban interests, and vice versa. PSD and PRO Romania (a PSD originated party) are very close to a maximum, the most urbanist party being USR (Save Romania Union), which only gained success at local elections in large cities, as Bucharest, Brasov or Timisoara (situation 2020). UDMR (Democratic Union of Hungarian in Romania) seem to be close to the rural area due to the fact that there are no large cities in the region where the Hungarian minority is located, and most of them are inhabited also by Romanians; by the opposite, rural area is dominated by villages with high percentage of Hungarians.

The **centre-periphery** divide was not politically influential in Romania (in terms of political parties, except PNT). First of all, the Romanian provinces were ethnically homogeneous (except Transylvania), also religiously and linguistically. Unlike countries such as Italy, with multiple local dialects, in Romania a rather unique language was spoken, at least since the 19th century. Last but not least, the excessive centralization and levelling during the communist period attenuated regional differences. In fact, the analysis of a centre-periphery cleavage in Romania can be done on two levels: first of all, we have a classic centre-periphery cleavage, theorized mainly by Rokkan. Secondly, we also have a series of regional cleavages, with the three major regions differing culturally from each other. The communist regime failed to diminish all of them, so there are visible differences among them, both economically and culturally. However, these were not strong enough to generate significant regionalist parties. The only important exception would be UDMR, a purely regionalist party, which receives votes from Hungarian-inhabited areas and has an agenda that is strictly addressed to the Hungarian minority. As a political cleavage produces, usually, two conflicting camps, some "centre" parties, or rather, those vehemently opposing UDMR, occurred. The first was also a regionalist party, namely PUNR (Party of the National Union of Romanians), which had a short-lived existence, but managed to win the Cluj-Napoca mayor office in 1992, through Gheorghe Funar, who ruled the city for 12 years. Also, in the early 1990s another party partially based on this political cleavage was present, Greater Romania Party (PRM), led by extremist CV Tudor. In just few years, PRM absorbed both PUNR voters and its structure and leader, Gheorghe Funar. Eventually, as regional differences declined, at least in political terms (yet social and economic divisions are still noticeable), and as UDMR was accepted as part

of the mainstream political arena, this political cleavage has been less visible, and eventually PRM disappeared around 2010.

While, except UDMR, there are no other regionalist parties, yet most of the Romanian parties have regional strongholds and weaknesses. PSD is strong in the Eastern and Southern parts of Romania, while PNL (and two decades ago PD/PDL), by the opposite, receives more votes in the centre and in the Western regions of Romania.

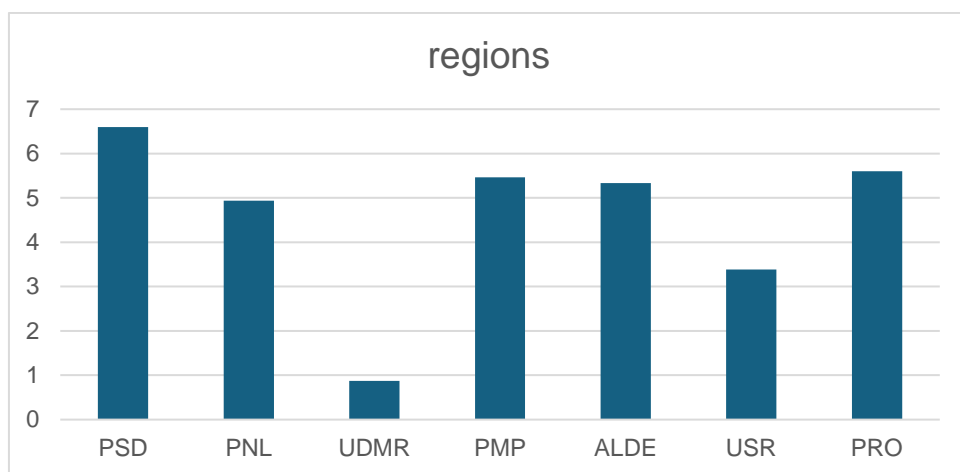


Figure 2. Pro-con political decentralisation in Romania.

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

Since there is no quantitative measurement regarding the centre-regional divide in Romania, we may employ the same Chapel Hill Expert Survey, assuming that the question regarding decentralisation covers the debated issue. Once again, PSD (and PRO Romania) are “strongly opposing political decentralization”, while UDMR and to a lesser extent USR are pro-decentralisation.

As any private ownership was banned by the communist regime and all production facilities nationalized, an **owner-worker** political cleavage, or an economic left-right one, was difficult to appear, at least in the early years of the transition. The first owners were small entrepreneurs who developed businesses in the area of trade. Privatization of state-owned economic enterprises started slowly, and privatization of the banking sector did not take place until 10 years after the revolution.

Obviously, the party that handled these first entrepreneurs of the transition, those with various liberal professions, was the PNL. When analysing a political cleavage, as compared with the situation when things start from an economic or social conflict, which leads to the emergence of two camps, which subsequently generate a pair of opposing parties, in this political cleavage, things were different. Basically, for electoral reasons, historical inheritance, etc., the FSN (National Salvation Front, today's PSD) took over a good number of the workers, manual labourers, simple employees ("the have-nots"), while the entrepreneurs and small businesspeople naturally supported PNL, PNTCD, even PD⁹ (member, in the 1990s, of the Socialist International).

Due to the fact that FSN/PDSR/PSD was in government for very long periods of time, it was the beneficiary of two economic situations with unusual effects. On the one hand, as the party in government, the PSD became a party courted by the business community, both formally and especially informally. On the other hand, PSD was the party that negotiated the *acquis communautaire* between 2000 and 2004. One of the basic requirements was the existence of a functioning market economy, which obviously would

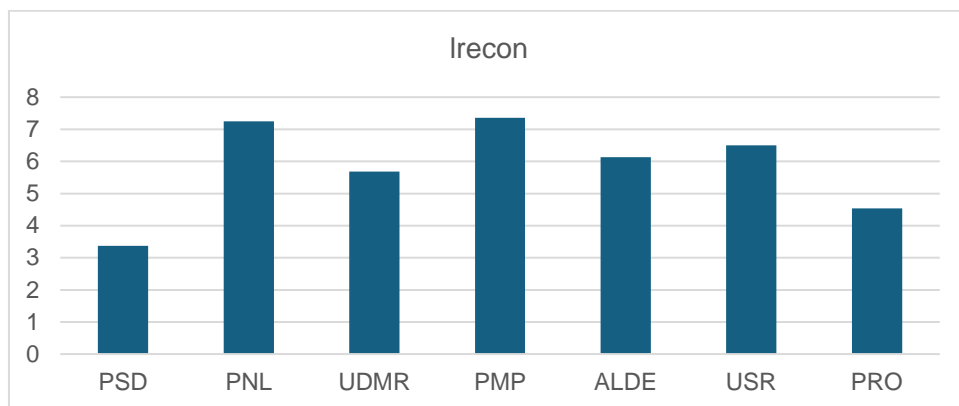


Figure 3. Ideological stance on economic.

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

⁹ PD (Democratic Party, formed around the reformist faction of FSN. While the conservatives left to form what is known today as PSD, the party adopted its new name in 1993 and a clear social-democratic ideology. The party started to move towards the right and in 2005 joined European Peoples Party. The main Romanian party around 2005-2010, after several electoral losses in 2012-2014, merged with PNL.

rather favour the "owners" side of the divide. Empirically, we can say that the PSD is the recipient of both sides of this cleavage, with an obvious surplus from the workers' side.

While being friendly with the business community, PSD, both as voters and policies is a party of the economic left. On the other side are PNL and PMP (Peoples Movement Party, a faction of former PD/PDL) and also USR.

One of the cleavages that raises difficulties in being located in different areas or periods is the **State-Church** cleavage. Having its origin in the conflict between the newly emerging nation-states' elites and the powerful Catholic Church, it led to the separation, in various forms, of Catholic clergy and followers from the state administration, including civic disobedience or refusal of voting. Eventually, the Catholic community was integrated into the political arenas, participating in elections through Christian-democratic parties, having the radical-liberal parties as their main opponents. In an attenuated form, the cleavage also appeared in Catholic/Protestant spaces (the Netherlands, Germany), but to a lesser extent in Protestant ones (Norway, Sweden). Over the course of more than a century, society has changed profoundly, and the process of secularization has led to the diminishing of this cleavage.

Central and Eastern European space found itself in a similar situation after 1989. It is true, after decades of communist atheism, many citizens tried to reconnect to a religious dimension, and local churches became crowded, yet without being in the situation of the emergence of a state-church divide as in the mid-19th century.

Can one consider in this case that the religious factor as unimportant in society or politics? The answer is, of course, negative, but some clarifications must be made. The role of the Church in all European countries is diminished. Immigration, especially of Muslims, has shifted the religious vote, with parties of the left becoming pro-immigrationists, while conservatives and sovereigntists collecting the Churchgoers' votes. The easiest way for analysing religious voting is to theoretically adopt a religious-secular cleavage, instead of the classical state-church one. The concept does not have a defined theoretical source, being used in various recent studies.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gary Marks, L. Hooghe, M. Nelson and E. Edwards, "Party Competition and European Integration in East and West: Different Structure, Same Causality", *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(2), 2006, p.157

The various controversies within Romanian society, such as the Referendum for the family, the refusal of many priests to wear masks, or the mass held despite the quarantine during the covid period, are all evidence that this issue is present in the Romanian social space, with a strong capacity to influence the vote.

Curiously, the party that consistently takes advantage of the influence of the (Orthodox) Church in society is PSD. The party has a long relationship of collaboration with the Romanian Orthodox Church, starting with Archbishop Calinic, who was elected on the FSN lists in 1990, to the participation of the leaders of this party in various church actions. Besides PNȚCD, with a profitable relationship with both the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic Churches in the 1990s, at the moment, the party significantly connected to the religious area is AUR. In fact, many AUR leaders have appeared in the public space coming from the Coalition for the Family, but also from the anti-vaxxer area,¹¹ supported by the neo-Protestant churches, but also Orthodox, with Diana Șoșoacă as the main figure.¹²

As figure 4 proves, almost all Romanian parties are strong supporters of religious principles in politics, mainly the social-democrats. The only party opposing the matter is USR. While AUR was not established at the moment of the Chapel Hill survey, empirical evidence and the party behaviour and messages show that the party is very in favour of a greater role for the Church/religion in politics.

¹¹ Sergiu Mișcoiu, "Amestecul ideologic al AUR generează mobilizare", *Cross Border Talks*, 15 February 2023, [<https://www.crossbordertalks.eu/ro/2023/02/15/miscoiu-aur-ro/>], accessed 5 May 2024

¹² Vezi și Adina Marincea, "Legăturile AUR cu frățiile ortodoxe și neo-legionare. Rolul taberelor unde copiii sunt supuși propagandei", *Libertatea*, 1.02.2022, [<https://www.libertatea.ro/opinii/legaturile-aur-cu-fratiile-ortodoxe-si-neolegionare-rolul-taberelor-unde-copiii-sunt-supusi-propagandei-3953605>], accessed 12 August 2024; Magda Gradinaru, "Cum a crescut AUR în Frății ortodoxe tolerate de Biserică, așa cum BOR l-a tolerat și pe Zelea Codreanu. Manipulările via Sputnik și pericolul real", *Spotmedia*, 11.12.2020, [<https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/politica/de-citit-cum-a-crescut-aur-in-fratii-ortodoxe-tolerate-de-biserica-asa-cum-bor-l-a-tolerat-si-pe-zelea-codreanu-manipularile-via-sputnik-si-pericolul-real>], accessed 12 August 2023

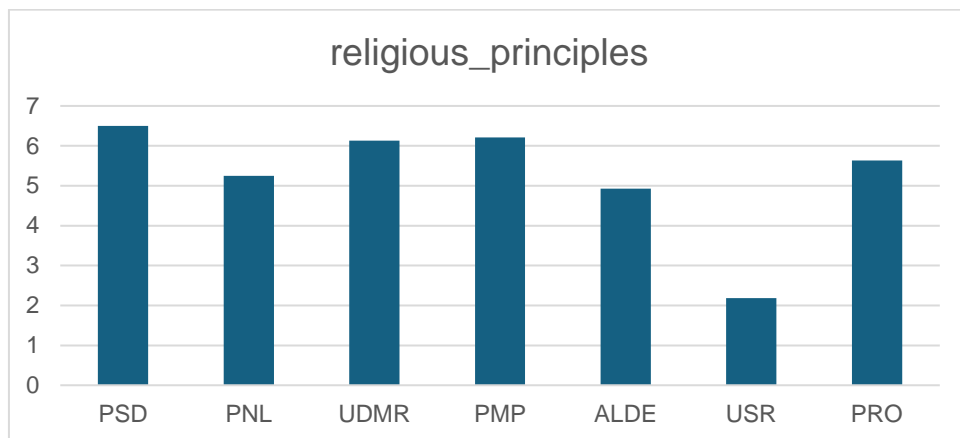


Figure 4. Position on role of religious principles in politics

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

Post-communist Political Cleavages

As in the case of Romania, any religious divide was cancelled by the fact that most Churches were banned (Greek Catholic, neo-protestants ones, etc.), priests put in jail, and the legal Churches had to work under harsh conditions. Due to industrialisation, millions of Romanians moved from rural areas to urban ones, severely affecting one of the most pre-communist political cleavages, the rural-urban one. A similar process took place within the regional divide. Communist leaders were carefully moving populations among the three main regions. In particular, in the Hungarian-inhabited areas, most of the people working in local administration and education were of Romanian origin, usually from distant areas. That being the case, these social differences did not disappear but were seriously reduced. Nevertheless, due to Romania's lack of social-economic modernisation, the political cleavages described by Rokkan are still active, more or less influential.

An extremely influential set of cleavages in the Central-Eastern European space is the one that emerged following the dissolution of communist regimes and that structured party systems in former communist states at least in the first decade, if not for a longer period. They are the post-communist cleavages, highly stimulating from a theoretical point of view, generating a dense literature in the first two decades of transition.

De Waelle and Kitchelt *et al*, among others, have analysed this set of cleavages, visible since the first years of the transition in CEE.¹³

De Waele proposed three cleavages specific to post-communist societies.¹⁴ The first of them concerns economic transition and opposes **maximalists to minimalists**. Maximalists are in favour of a rapid and total transition (maximalism - shock therapy), while minimalists were interested in a gradual transition without shocks¹⁵ It is an economic cleavage, and the stakes are the speed of transition and the preservation of economic status and it opposes those who want to preserve their status from the communist period (well-paid workers, directors of state enterprises) vs. entrepreneurs who emerged after 1990 or those with liberal professions: IT, trade and services. Influential only for a short period of time, it structured the party system; PSD, especially under Ion Iliescu's direct or indirect rule, was a minimalist party, while the so-called "historical" parties, PNL and PNȚCD were supporters of privatisation. As soon as the prospect of joining the EU was visible, all parties abandoned all opposition to privatisation and the market economy.

Decades of neglecting human rights and democratic values were sufficient to transform the society, at least partially, into one where these values were not welcomed, even after the fall of communism and after Romania started its transition to democracy. Thus, on this dimension, the cleavage that divided the society was the so-called **authoritarian-democratic** one. The two opposing sides were: those in favour of democracy, political modernization, European values vs. traditionalists or the supporters of national particularities. The latter were also against granting rights to national or other minorities and do (did) not see European integration as a

¹³ Jean-Michel De Waele, « 'Consolidation démocratique, partis et clivages en Europe centrale et orientale », in: J.-M. De Waele (ed.), *Parties politiques et démocratie en Europe centrale et orientale*, Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002, pp. 145-161.

Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski et al., *Post-communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-party Cooperation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999

¹⁴ Jean-Michele de Waele, *Partide politice in Europa centrala si de est*, București: Humanitas, 2003 ; for Romania see also Ovidiu Vaida, „Clivaje politice în România post-comunistă”, in *Sfera politicii*, no. 123-124, 2008, pp. 21-27.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 187.

priority.¹⁶ It is a cultural divide. Interestingly, this cleavage was less visible in the first decades after the fall of communism, possibly also under the pressure of EU integration and of benefits of traveling and working abroad. However, it has become increasingly visible in the last decade, at the beginning as various opinions in society or media, and later taking on organizational forms, such as the Coalition for the Family, and then under in the appearance of political parties, generically called sovereigntist.

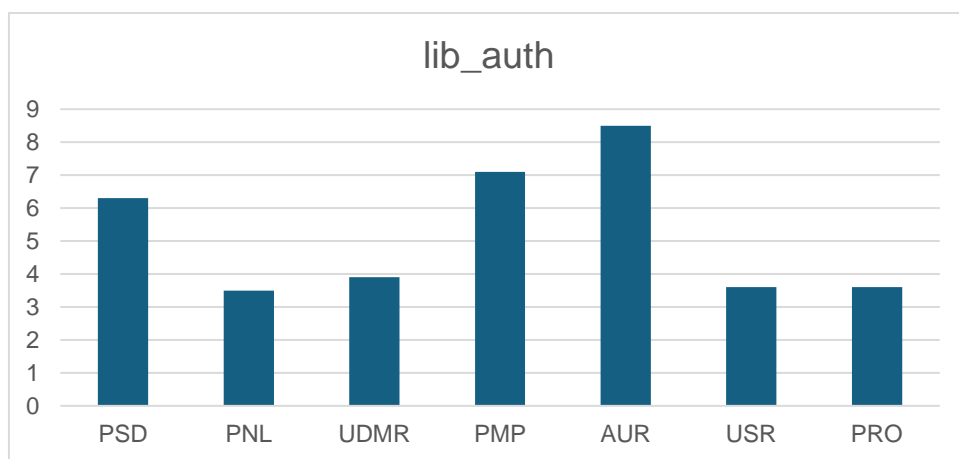


Figure 5. Position on liberal-authoritarian scale

Source: <https://eupoliticalbarometer.uc3m.es/dashboard/country/Romania>

Last but not least, the **communist-anti-communist** cleavage separates the opponents or critics of the communist regime from the successors of the communist structures or those who benefited to a great extent from communism and was the first to develop in Romanian society.¹⁷ But its degree of penetration was proportional to the consistency of civil society and the permissiveness of the communist regime. Although it did not deeply affect the Romanian society, it was one of the favourite themes of public opinion and of the first electoral campaigns. It also managed to structure political parties in a quite visible way. PSD was the main 'nostalgic' voice of the system, closely followed by PRM. On the other hand, PNTCD with nearly of its 1990s leaders being jailed during communism were fierce

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 189

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 190-192.

opponents of any sign of communism and also of the former party members still acting in politics. also clearly stood out. PNL alternated moments of anti-communism with those of collaboration with PSD, while PDL and UDMR did not position themselves politically according to this cleavage. In terms of influence, this cleavage diminished after the first decade.

Recent Political Cleavages: EU and postmaterialism

The accession to the European Union of the former communist states, including Romania, in 2004/2007 has almost completely reset the internal dynamics of the party systems and changed the theoretical paradigm. EU membership was expected with great confidence, and the effects were visible in just a few years.¹⁸ However, a certain fatigue, as well as the effect of the 2007-2008 crisis, almost overlapping the 2004/2007 enlargements made some of the newcomers feel hostility towards the European Union.

What was common in the Western countries, that is a political cleavage generated by EU membership started to develop in CEE countries that were EU members. In fact, it can be analysed as a genuine centre-periphery one, the centre being in this new case the “Commission” or “Brussels”. Although it has different origins, the EU-based political cleavage is similar to the one described earlier, developed right after the fall of communism, that is authoritarian-democratic, at least in its outcomes: those opposing further European integration are the same who disregard minority rights and political or social modernisation.

In Romania, as in other EEC countries, the cleavage has generated a cultural conflict between the centre, which tries to impose various standard rules in all states, and those who, at the national level, are in favour of a strong Brussels and the peripheries (electorates in the national states), which try to limit the influence of the EU, generating an ethno-cultural separatism. The latter group generated the Eurosceptic parties, supporters of an economic but not a political union. At least in the pre- and post-2007 period, all Romanian parties were pro-European, including PRM.

¹⁸ In the case of Romania, GDP per capita increased more than three times since 2006, the year before joining the EU; [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_10_10/default/table?lang=en], accessed 22 May 2024.

This attitude was not necessarily due to any intense Europeanism of the Romanians but to the effect of the advantages brought by European integration, from the right to work or study in more developed countries to the funds that were directed to Romania and that generated visible effects in just a few years. The first party with certain sovereigntist tendencies was PSD, especially when it was led by Liviu Dragnea. From an organisational point of view, the citizens opposing Brussels backed a topic not necessarily related to European integration, the marriage right for same-sex persons. They formed an umbrella organisation, Coalition for the Family, which gathered 3 million signatures in order to amend one article in the Constitution, the one dealing with family. More precisely, their objective was to change the form “marriage of the spouses” into “marriage of a man and a woman”. The proposal was supported mainly by PSD, which eventually generated a referendum in 2018. Although 91% of those who voted were in favour, the 30% threshold was not achieved, and the proposal was rejected. Nevertheless, this action was strong enough to lead to the formation of a Eurosceptic, traditionalist, extremist party, AUR (Alliance for the Union of Romanians).

On the other hand, the most pro-European party is USR, which in the case of referendum was strongly against changing the Constitution.¹⁹

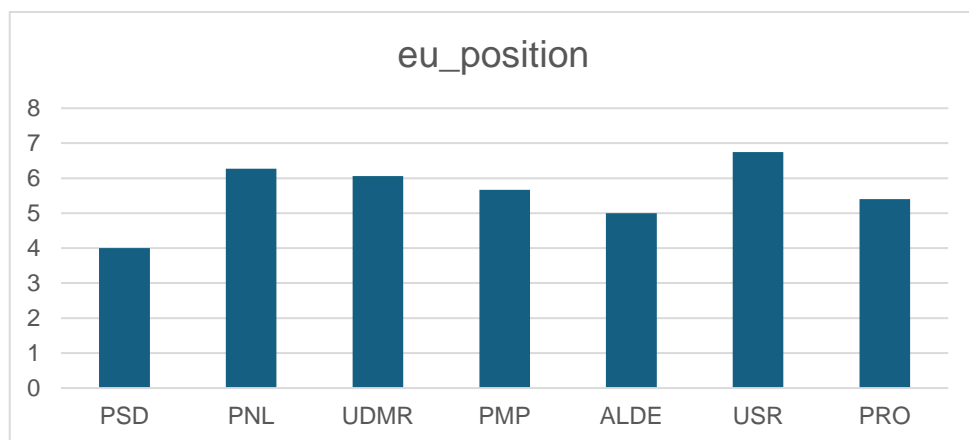


Figure 6. Position on role of religious principles in politics

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

¹⁹ The debate inside the party was so intense, that the founder of the party Nicusor Dan left the party, himself being in favour of a free choice for party members and not a clear indication of how to vote.

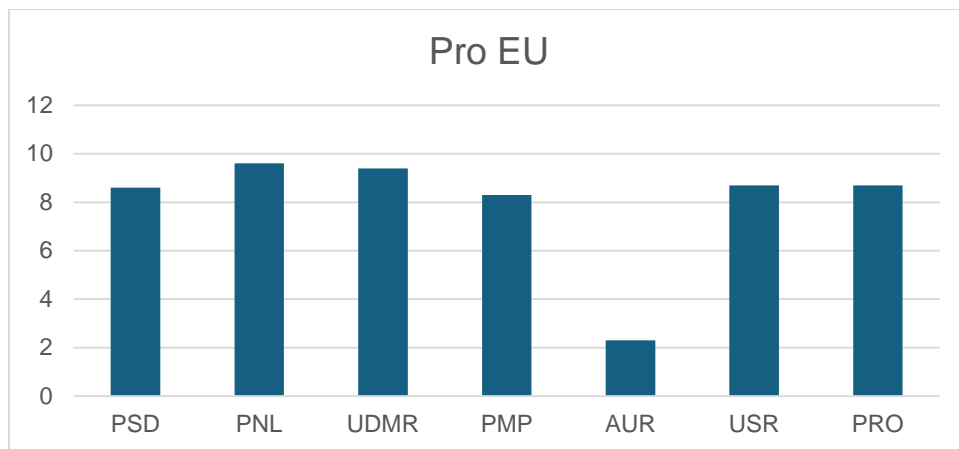


Figure 7. Position on European Union

Source: <https://eupoliticalbarometer.uc3m.es/dashboard/country/Romania>

The difference between the two charts (see, for instance, the position of PSD) is the result of time of analysis and political situation. Figure 6 display results collected before 2019, when PSD had a soft anti-EU position, voiced by its leader, Liviu Dragnea and several lower ranked MPs. After Liviu Dragnea was dismiss, PSD expelled all anti-EU members and took a rather pro-EU stance (EU funds which eventually were directed to their mayors being an important factor in these regard), situation pointed out in figure 7, in which data were collected between 2020 and 2023. To summarise, USR and PNL are the most pro-EU parties, while AUR (only figure 7) is by far the most anti-EU or Eurosceptic political party.

Tremendous postwar economic development in Western Europe, but also in the USA, Canada and Australia led to wealth, rising living standards, an environment in which the baby boomer generation has grown up. They were interested in different political beliefs compared to their parents, which has led, in addition to the inevitable intergenerational conflicts, to the appearance of new political behaviours, including in the voting preferences. Ronald Inglehart was the first to notice the political shift in the new generations, whom he called postmaterialists.²⁰ They enjoyed different

²⁰ Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977

political values, such as nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, feminism, rights for different communities such as LGBT, immigrants, etc. The left-wing parties have tried to integrate this electorate, also absorbing most of their values, which in the long run has led to the loss of the main left-wing electoral group, namely the workers, many of them migrating to other ideological areas, even right-wing or extreme right ones.

In any case, the emergence of post-materialists led to the change of profile of the left-wing parties and also at the surfacing of new parties, such as the environmentalists of the centre-left liberal ones.

One must discuss postmaterialism in CEE with care, due to communist heritage, that is leveled societies and poverty. Postmaterialism occurred in wealthy countries and inside prosperous social groups. Despite the economic stability of the 1960s-1970s, communist countries faced serious development difficulties, especially after 1980.²¹

The question is whether the Romanian society can be divided into the two categories proposed by Inglehart. Since 1993, surveys designed by Inglehart and later developed by the World Value Survey are carried out in Romania. Different studies show that the divide is more and more visible, as the WVS surveys are made at intervals further and further from 1989.²²

Was the development of Romania, especially after joining the EU, enough to generate postmaterialists who further join the political arena under the umbrella of like-minded parties?

The strongest argument in support of an affirmative answer is the emergence of the Union Save Romania. Forcibly placed on a left-right scale by various commentators, usually in the press, or categorized in the classical families, the USR party is best situated in the materialist-postmaterialist divide. The party itself had difficulties in ideologically identifying itself, solving the matter after an internal referendum, when 91% of the party members assumed a centre-right position.²³

²¹ See also Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500-2010)*, Iași: Polirom, 2010

²² Bogdan Voicu, Mălina Voicu (eds.), *Valori ale românilor: 1993-2006. O perspectivă sociologică* [Romanian values: 1993-2006. A sociological perspective], Iași: Editura Institutul European, 2007

²³ <https://www.g4media.ro/rezultatele-referendumului-din-usr-91-dintre-votanti-s-au-pronuntat-pentru-pozitionarea-doctrinara-ca-partid-de-centru-dreapta.html>, accessed 20 May 2024

If USR has profiled on the post-materialist zone, are there any "materialist" parties? While the Chapel Hill Expert Survey does not specifically discuss this matter, we could consider that the question regarding the GALTAN dimension may offer some valuable data:

"Green, Alternative, Liberal" parties typically support more expansive personal freedoms—greater civil liberties, same-sex marriage, a greater role for citizens in governing, etc. Conversely, parties on the "Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalism" end of the spectrum typically reject these ideas, favoring instead law and order; tradition; the belief that the government should be a strong moral authority.²⁴

Empirically, it seems that PSD and to a lesser extent AUR are in the "materialist" camp, which explains PSD style of governmental policy, of permanently increasing pensions, scholarships or state-employed wages.

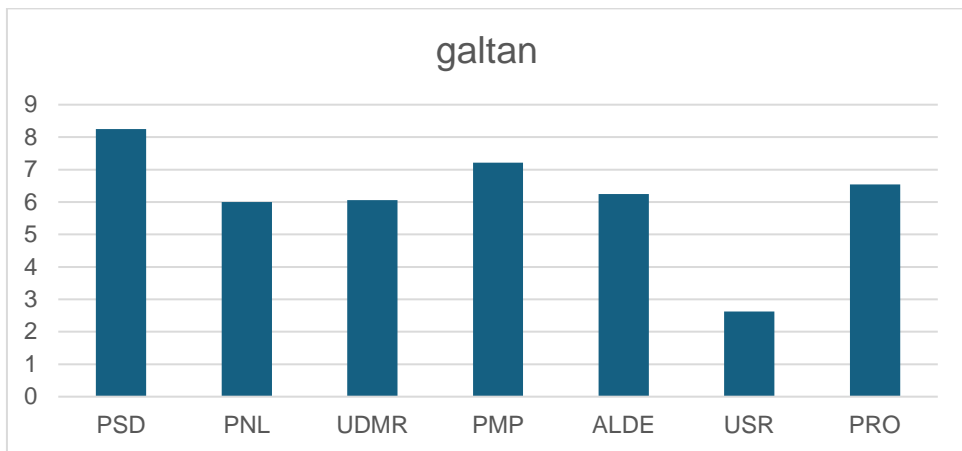


Figure 8. Position on role of religious principles in politics

Source: Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Romania (<https://www.chesdata.eu/ches-europe>)

²⁴ Anna Brigeovich, with Ryan Bakker and Blake Smith, "Unpacking the social (GAL/TAN) dimension of party politics: Euroscepticism and party positioning on Europe's "other," Paper presented at the European Union Studies Association Biannual Conference in Miami, May 2017.

Conclusion

After analysing all political cleavages that shaper post-communist Romania, by taking into consideration three sets of them, displayed in historical order and by salience, a matrix of variables will be summarised. Three of them will be employed, H meaning of high importance, M, medium, while L (low) indicates that the issue discussed influences on a small scale the party or the party does not consider it as relevant.

PSD is a party based on regional differences, even it used to be against decentralisation, at least in the first years of the transition. Also, it is the party significantly connected to the rural area and to the workers. Due to that, its policies are materialists one, with little interest in terms of rights or the environment. PNL is closed to the business community, being strongly against higher taxation or other measures affecting them. Also, the party left its urbanist stance, moving slowly into the rural area, gaining in the recent elections more than one third of the mayoral offices. Last but not least, is a pro-EU political party.

Table 1. Party position on certain issues, based on graphs 1-7 and also own evaluations

	PSD	PNL	AUR	UDMR	USR	PMP
Periphery/ Regions	M/H	M	M	H	L	M
Rural	H	M	M/H	M	L	M
Urban	L	M/H	M	M	H	M
Owners*	M	M/H	L	L	M	H
Workers**	H	L	M	L	L	L
Material	H	M	M/H	M	L	H
Post-material	L	M	L	M	H	L
Pro-EU	M	M/H	L	M/H	H	M
Anti-EU	M	L	H	L	L	L
Liberal	L	M	L	M	H	L
Authoritarian	M/H	L	H	L	L	M

* also, reduced role in economy for the government

**also, government involved in the economy.

A newcomer, AUR voices rather social or cultural values, such as national or traditional ones, rejecting EU or modernising influence. By the opposite, USR is the most pro-EU Romanian political party, being also close to environmental protection and progressive social values. UDMR, based on its roots, is close to rural and regional issues, especially decentralisation; its pro-EU stance may be a strategic one, due to the strong protection of ethnic minorities within the European Union. PMP is the classical conservative party, pro-business and mild-pro EU. Since it performed poorly at the 2024 elections, it became a marginal party.²⁵

Political cleavages matter. They shape political parties and strengthen electoral choices. Romanian political parties and their orientation developed both due to existent cleavages but also due to other factors, such as external (EU) influence or economic development. The main divides were, at the start of the transition, the rural-urban, the regional, the communist heritage and the economic ones. As the country joined the European Union and progressed both economically and socially, new political cleavages surfaced. The authoritarian-democratic (liberal) resurfaced in the recent years. It was doubled by the materialist-postmaterialist divide. The list is complete with the addition of the EU membership-based political cleavages. All these can explain why the political parties based on these cleavages not only emerged, but also survived, such as AUR or USR, as compared with dozens of parties that appeared (and quickly disappeared) during the entire transition, being factions of the main parties and not socially based or bottom-to-top created.

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²⁵ Pro Romania was measured during all the analyses mentioned. Yet, due to the fact it could not enter the Parliament in 2020, it slowly vanished, its leaders being integrated into PSD.

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