



Electoral Reforms in Romania Towards a Majoritarian Electoral System?¹

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Abstract:

After the fall of the communist regime, Romania chose to adopt a very inclusive electoral system, namely PR with low threshold and a guaranteed representation of minorities. Since then, the story of the Romanian electoral system is the story of a movement to make the electoral law less inclusive. Legal thresholds have been introduced and raised, and proposals to shift to a majoritarian system are gaining ground among Romanian politicians. In this article, the main motivations pushing for a less inclusive electoral law are examined. It appears that the largest Romanian parties hope the reform will strengthen their political representation. Yet, by proposing a less inclusive electoral law, they are playing a risky game in a political system still marked by high electoral volatility. Furthermore, the dominant model of democracy that guides the choice of electoral rules has evolved. The new model of democracy gives a reduced role to parties and a bigger role to individual politicians. Finally, the memory of the democratic interwar period is losing influence among the Romanian political elite. Consequently, the proportional representation (PR) system in use during this period is losing its attractiveness.

Keywords: Electoral reforms, elections, Romania, electoral systems, institutional choice

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Introduction

In the last fifteen years, a new field has been opened in electoral studies. The conditions under which electoral systems are adopted and reformed are being examined. Inspired by the wave of electoral system changes that has occurred since the early 1990s (Norris 2004), several scholars have contributed to gaining a better insight on the reasons electoral reforms are promoted. Before this, the politics behind electoral reforms were barely studied. This perspective was mainly due to a lack of empirical material, as election laws were characterized by stability (Nohlen 1984). The democratization of Eastern and Central Europe and the selection of new electoral rules turned out to be the catalyst for analysing how electoral institutions are adopted. Fifteen years later, the time has come to see how Eastern European electoral experiences and reforms may contribute to the field of electoral studies in general.

In that sense, the Romanian case is a very interesting one, especially concerning the law for elections to the Chamber of Deputies. According to Rose and Munro, electoral institutions have become stable in the post-communist states of Eastern and Central Europe after the second democratic election; since then only minor amendments have been adopted (Rose and Munro 2003). This general pattern does not fit the Romanian case. On the contrary, amendments to the electoral law have been adopted for almost every parliamentary election since 1990. First, a threshold has been adopted in Romania like in some other post-communist countries (Dawisha and Deets 2006). First a 3% threshold was adopted. Then it was raised to 5% of the votes for parties and 8% to 10% for cartels. More significantly, since 1999 has been debating a possible shift from PR to majority run-off elections. All these reforms offer new opportunities to enrich our knowledge of electoral system changes.

The goal of this article is to determine how these amendments to the Romanian electoral law and the proposals to shift to majority elections can be explained. Do they confirm the main argument of Boix and Benoit that electoral laws are changed by politicians motivated by the hope of gaining power? Or do other elements such as ideology or contextual variable interfere with strategic aims (Blais, Massicotte and Yoshinaka 2005)?

1. Models of Electoral System Change

The most frequently underlined determinant that explains the attitude of a given party about a potential amendment to the electoral law is its self-interest. Parties are perceived as looking for the rule that would maximize their political influence. According to Boix, "the ruling political parties, anticipating the (varying) effects of different electoral regimes, choose the regime that maximizes their chances of staying in power" (Boix 1999: 611). Under this general principle, several definitions of power have been arrived at. The most evident is that political influence is related to the share of seats a party can secure. Therefore, parties will defend the electoral rule that maximizes their share of the seats (Benoit 2004). For others, parties do not simply look at an electoral law in light of its impact on the allocation of seats among parties, but also take into account how it would allow them to influence policies. In that respect, a party would not back any electoral rule that reduces its chances of being in power (Bawn 1993). Finally, authors such as De Mesquita (2000) have demonstrated that political actors also keep in mind the potential impact of any change to the electoral law on the allocation of votes. As a consequence, they would prefer amendments leading voters to vote more for them and less for their competitors.

Apart from these strategy-oriented approaches to electoral reform, other determinants have been isolated in the literature. Recently, the relative impact of values and ideology has been underlined (Bowler, Donovan and Karp 2006). Although these motivations should be treated carefully, parties are also looking for an electoral law fitting their ideological model of democracy (Katz 1997). Their goal is to incorporate their 'model of democracy' in the institutional architecture of the country including the electoral system.

Thirdly, contextual elements appear to play a role in the choice of electoral rules. Even if guided by strategic and ideological motivations, political actors are constrained in their decisions by factors such as the history of the country, its sociological structure, or some elements of foreign influence. The impact of history was underlined by Bawn (1993) when she showed that unfavourable perceptions of electoral laws in the past make it difficult to adopt the same legislation even decades after. On the contrary, a former electoral system that left a favourable historical

perception has a better chance to be adopted. An additional contextual factor is the sociological structure of the country. In countries like New Zealand with a strong ethnic minority (Maoris), the representation of minorities is an element constraining the choices of reformers (Nagel 1994). Elements of foreign influence have also been highlighted. For example, in their analysis of post-colonial countries, Blais and Massicotte have demonstrated that post-colonial states tend to adopt the electoral law of the former colonizer (Blais and Massicotte 1997).

The combination of strategic motivations, ideological determinants, and contextual factors in the politics of electoral reforms of Eastern and Central European countries in 1989-1990 has previously been underlined by Birch, Millard, Popescu and Williams (2002). From their collective work, it appeared that the choice of the first democratic electoral law after the communist period was conditioned by the following three elements. First, the weight of history was important: the unfavourable legacy of the communist regime and positive perceptions of the interwar regime were indeed strong determinants. Elements of foreign influence also played a part, as countries were advised by foreign experts from neighbour countries or from the OSCE. Values such as fairness and transparency were also significantly present in the debates. Finally, actors were definitely taking into consideration the impact of the new legislation on their expected political influence.

2. Going less inclusive: the Romanian Electoral Law (1990-2006)

When Romania adopted its first electoral legislation for elections to the Chamber of Deputies in 1990, the legislative body gave a clear preference for a very inclusive electoral law. Consequently, proportional representation with closed lists was chosen. Elections were to be held under this formula in 42 constituencies (41 districts + Bucharest) in a two-tier system (district level and national level for remainder seats). In line with the preference for inclusiveness, specific mechanisms were introduced to guarantee a minimum representation for ethnic minorities. Supplementary seats were created and assigned to ethnic minorities that did not succeed in securing a direct seat but that, first, received one-tenth of the minimum number of votes that a political party needed to win a seat and, second, received more than any other organisation representing the same ethnic minority.

The preference for this very inclusive approach produced a relatively fragmented parliament. In the first democratic elections in 1990, 27 parties and 9 ethnic minorities were represented in the Chamber of Deputies (Preda 2002a: 557). The share of seats dominated by one big party limited the effects of this fragmentation. Indeed, if many parties were directly represented in the parliament, one major group, the FSN (*Frontul Salvării Naționale* – National Salvation Front), dominated the Chamber of Deputies with 66.4% of all seats. But this was somewhat illusory. The FSN was too diverse, and therefore the formation of a ruling coalition within the FSN was very complicated. For the second democratic elections in 1992, 25 parties and 13 ethnic minorities had at least one MP. This time, the fragmentation became more problematic as there was no longer a single dominant group. The bigger party, the FDSN (*Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale* – Democratic National Salvation Front), had only 35.7% of all deputies. Laakso and Taagepera's index illustrates this evolution between 1990 and 1992. In 1990, the number of effective parliamentary in Romania was 1.63, while in 1992 it rose to 5.13 (Preda 2002b: 130).

It should be noted that various amendments were proposed even before the 1992 elections in order to reduce the inclusiveness of the electoral legislation. As a direct consequence, the first measure limiting access to Parliament was adopted for the second free elections. Indeed, a threshold of 3% was introduced, but with limited effects as already illustrated above. The lack of success of this legislative amendment continued in the 1996 elections. In 1996, 27 parties and 15 ethnic minorities were represented in the Chamber. Four years later, the threshold was raised to 5% for individual parties, plus 3% for the second party, and plus one percent for each additional party up to a maximum of 10%. This time, the measure did limit the number of parties in the Chamber of deputies. Indeed, in the Chamber of Deputies elected in 2000, 6 parties² and 18 ethnic minorities were represented.

In parallel, note should be taken that the raising of the electoral threshold engendered a high degree of disproportionality, transforming the formerly inclusive Romanian electoral system into a rare example of a 'disproportional PR system'. In

² There were 7 parties in December 2000. In 2001, the small historical social-democratic party (PSDR) merged with the PDSR and the current PSD is born.

1996, 17.9% of all votes were attributed to parties that wound up getting no seats in the Chamber of Deputies. In other words, about one fifth of the Romanian electorate was not represented in the lower assembly. In 2000, this proportion rose to 21.9% (Preda 2002b : 131).

Before a detailed analysis of these various changes, note should be taken that starting with the end of the 1990s, the high level of fragmentation led some parties to go one step further and propose shifting from proportional representation to majority elections. Uni-nominal formulas had had supporters back during the early 1990s discussions on the electoral law. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, this dream was back on the political agenda mainly on the initiative of some of the biggest parties. The Liberals (PNL) were the first significant party to propose a major shift 1999 towards a uni-nominal electoral system (Popescu 2002). In line with this wind of change, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) included in its 2000 government programme a project for electoral reform in the direction of French-style two-round majority elections (Soare 2004: 98). Among Romanian MPs, the shift to majority elections is gaining more and more support. The proposal for radical reform has been even more seducing since the 2000 elections and the breakthrough of the PRM, which became the second parliamentary party. For other parties, the success of the PRM was the sign that important changes were needed to restore the legitimacy of the Romanian political system. Shifting to a majoritarian electoral system was for some part of the answer.

Nor have these demands for reform been quieted by the last parliamentary and presidential elections in 2004. Fragmentation in parliaments was somewhat reduced, as 6 parties are now represented in the Chamber of deputies: PSD, PUR, PNL, PD, PRM and UDMR³. Nevertheless, a shift to majoritarian formula has more support than ever, as three big parties are behind it. It is opposed only by the PRM and the UDMR. Its adoption would probably be the next step towards a more exclusionary electoral system in the country.

³ Actually, PSD and PUR formed an alliance for the 2004 elections. So did the PD and the PNL.

3. Why go less inclusive?

The mandate threshold, and the proposal for majority elections, demonstrate that the Romanian electoral system is moving toward becoming less inclusive. The aim of this article is to answer the question: Why has Romania chosen this direction of change? In other words, why does the Romanian legislator want to limit the inclusiveness of the electoral framework? As mentioned earlier, several elements might lend support to an explanation of these amendments. On the one hand, the values and the models of democracy promoted by the Romanian parties may have shifted, evolved. Their electoral strategy, and their understanding of what electoral law is most effective for their political influence may also have changed. Sixteen years later, the relevance of contextual variables like history and sociology might not be the same, either. All these elements will be analysed in order to get a better grip on why the Romanian electoral law is progressively shifting towards a less inclusive formula.

3.1. Towards a new model of democracy

The introduction of successive and ever-higher thresholds, as well as the proposal to shift to majority elections, clearly indicate a transformation in the primary goal Romanian parties wish to achieve through electoral legislation for parliamentary elections. According to Katz (1997), the institutional architecture of a country reflects the main values legislators wish to implement, the model of democracy they hope to realise. As the electoral law is a central component of the institutional architecture, its configuration also reflects the values of the legislator; that is, the model of democracy that was prevalent at the time of the adoption of a new electoral legislation.

In 1989 and 1990, when the first electoral rules were set in Romania⁴, the dominant model of democracy for Romanian political leaders was articulated around two preoccupations. First, they wanted to have a very inclusive political system. Their fear was that some political actors would be excluded from the newly-established democracy (noting that they could even exclude themselves). This preoccupation

⁴ DECRET-LOI no.92 / 14 march 1990 for the election of the Parliament and of the President. M.Of. no. 35/18 March 1990.

was reinforced by the streets riots of 1990. In order to stabilize the country, no opposition group and no ethnic minority was to be sidelined by exclusionary electoral legislation. In that sense, the main aim was to avoid concentrating all powers in the hands of a few parties. Proportional representation was supposed to allow all significant political forces to be represented in parliament. Thus, the political debate was to take place within the institutions, not outside of them. Mechanisms to guarantee parliamentary representation for ethnic minorities were introduced for the same reasons⁵. Being represented in parliament, ethnic groups were thus included within the democratic system. In return, their demands for autonomy were expected to be reduced. Furthermore, the inclusion of minorities within the system was supposed to strengthen the legitimacy of the whole system.

The second motivation was to solidify the Romanian political system. After a long period of communist domination, one of the primary goals was to introduce political pluralism as opposed to the communist one-party regime (De Waele 2000). Pluralism was enhanced by two elements: multipartism, and strong political parties. Once again, PR was conceived as the appropriate formula for both. Firstly, unlike majority systems, PR prevented giving a clear majority to one party, and therefore was perceived as a guarantee of multipartism and thus a safety belt for building democracy. Second, PR with closed lists was promoted to help parties build themselves into strong organisations. Closed lists made it possible for party central offices to control their candidates and MPs – see Panebianco. In addition, proportional representation was supposed to allow parties to have a constant, if minimum, representation in parliament, and therefore to allow them the necessary framework for gradual organisational consolidation.

These primary goals, inclusiveness and political pluralism, which in 1989-1990 determined the choice of proportional representation, gradually faded away in the years afterward. Firstly, under a situation of pervasive parliamentary fragmentation, pluralism and multipartism were more and more criticized. The fragmentation of parliamentary representation, and the large number of parties competing in elections and represented in the Chamber of Deputies, began to present a problem. The idea

⁵ Introducing some elements of minority representation was also a clear rupture with the strongly Romanian-nationalist communist regime.

that too many parties were a threat to efficiency in politics and to government stability gained an audience in the country. The main preoccupation was no longer to have multipartism as opposed to a one-party system, but instead to have a kind of restricted pluralism as opposed to extreme multipartism. Several initiatives were taken in the 1990s to reduce the number of political parties. The electoral threshold has already been mentioned. Furthermore, laws regulating parties were adopted. In 1996, the Romanian legislature passed a law requiring parties to have at least 10,000 members residing in at least 15 districts, with at least 300 members per district, to be registered officially as a political party. In 2003, the minimum amount of members required was raised to 25,000 in at least 18 districts and in Bucharest, with at least 700 members per district. The proposal to introduce a majoritarian system goes one step further by promoting bipartism instead of multipartism. To sum up, in about 15 years the first component of the dominant model of democracy in Romania – pluralism- was substituted by a quest for bipartism. The consequence of this shift is that the preferred electoral system is no longer inclusive PR but majoritarian.

Pluralism was not the only value of the 1989-1999 model of democracy to be gradually modified. After the collapse of the communist regime, having strong well-organised parties was an important preoccupation. In the 1989-1990 model, democracy and strong parties were closely associated. Almost fifteen years later, like in most European democracies, increasing distrust of political parties has induced a transformation in this regard. Mobilizing populist arguments on the poor quality of parties and their negative influence on the quality of democracy brought to the agenda the idea that institutional reform is necessary. Changes were explained as necessary to reduce the influence of parties on political life in general, and, more specifically, the control of the parties' Bucharest headquarters' over their MPs and local politics. The National Liberals and the Alliance for Romania were among the first to bring up the idea that closed lists give too much influence to the parties at the expense of the voters. Instead, they proposed a kind of preferential voting system (Popescu 2002). This first proposal was followed later by another one suggesting a shift to majority elections. Once again, the independence of candidates was one of the core values at the heart of this proposal, illustrating a shift in the envisioned model of democracy.

3.2. Strategic choice and uncertainty

In general, research on electoral reforms has primarily taken into account the parties' strategy for maximizing their political influence as the impulse for changes in the electoral arena. The Romanian case is certainly no exception in that sense. Already in 1990 and still today, parties have never been active in this field without evaluating the impact a reform would have on their strength. Yet, unlike in the established democracies, the peculiarity in Eastern and Central Europe is that strategies are being defined in a situation where uncertainty is the key variable (Kaminski 2002). This is the case for the Romanian arena as well.

When the first electoral law was adopted in 1990, one of the main problems for those in charge of drafting the new electoral system was a lack of information on how votes and seats were likely to be allocated after the first elections. No reliable estimate existed to help them anticipate the coming political configuration (De Waele 2000). There was nothing the experts or political scientists could do to help and advise these reformers. In 1990 the parties were extremely weak, and voters' preferences undefined. As a consequence, a pure proportional representation was chosen. PR was perceived as a safe option, as no party could be sure of gaining a plurality of votes, and no major actor was excluded (Geddes 1996). The situation was even less clear in countries like Romania, where there was no structured communist party left to play a role (Lijphart 1992). In that sense, the choice of a very inclusive electoral system was prudent and strategically logical.

In the years after, uncertainty remained a core variable in the choice of electoral law in Romania. Firstly, parties since 1990 have been highly versatile. Party splits are common. Within the social-democratic families, three parties, the PSDR, the PDSR and the PD, have competed, and two remain. New parties are created often. Alliances between parties that used to be opponents are not rare. The political trajectory of the PSDR illustrates this perfectly. In 1996, the PSDR was the ally of the PD within the coalition USD. They won the elections and formed a ruling coalition, while the PDSR was the dominant opposition party. Four years later, the PSDR and the PDSR formed an alliance. Old opponents became allies. In 2001, they even merged into one party: the PSD. The multiplicity of alliances and frequent splintering

of parties are the two major elements making it difficult for Romanian parties to anticipate the results of the next elections.

Moreover, a high degree of electoral volatility is another element increasing the uncertainty about the outcome of elections (Bielasiak 2002). Most parties do not have a stable and loyal group of voters to rely upon. The most extreme example is the CDR and its main party the PNTCD. The PNTCD was the dominant party within the ruling coalition in 1996. But in the following elections in 2000, it lost all parliamentary representation.

A final element contributing to the uncertainty characterising elections in Romania is the poor quality of polls. In most democracies, thanks to polls published in the media parties can evaluate how much of the vote they can expect to gain in the next elections. Even if parties are aware that there is a difference between polls and the reality of elections, they can rely upon the polls to a certain extent. In Romania, the situation is significantly different. Polls are most of time, if not always, false. For instance, there are few countries in Europe where polls about the second round of a presidential election turned out to be wrong, and Romania is one of them. In 2004, just before the elections polls predicted that Nastase was going to become Romania's next president by a margin of 4% to 5%. But in the end Nastase (48.77%) was defeated by Basescu (51.23%). All these elements combined to create an environment where uncertainty about the results of upcoming elections is high.

However, even if uncertainty remains high in Romania, parties' attitudes are less prudent since 1996 than they used to be in 1990. As said earlier, when uncertainty is high, parties tend to prefer inclusive electoral rules like PR with a low threshold (Andrews and Jackman 2005). But the recent history of the Romanian electoral law goes against this precautionary principle. The big parties, feeling threatened and disadvantaged by the fragmentation of parliamentary representation, have pushed for a less inclusive system. They have raised the electoral threshold twice: in 1992 (3%) and in 2000 (5%). Fearing that the threshold is insufficient, the biggest party in recent elections – the PSD- wants to go one step further and change to majority elections. The hope of the PSD is to have an absolute majority of seats. Reasoning in this manner, however, they appear to forget that electoral results in Romania are highly uncertain. As time goes by, prudence is fading away.

Finally, the only strategically coherent, stable, and prudent position is the one defended by parties representing ethnic minorities like the UDMR (Hungarians). In the early democratic period they received guaranteed representation in the Chamber of Deputies. This has allowed them to have a parliamentary presence above their demographic weight. Some would argue that majoritarian systems would not necessarily be a disadvantage. The UDMR might be able to gain seats in some single-member districts where Hungarians are dominant. Yet the UDMR does not follow this line of argument. The growing competition the UDMR has to face with the appearance of another Magyar party, the UCM, has increased the UDMR's prudence. As a consequence, the party prefers to defend the current system of legislation. For the UDMR, a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. With the current system they are certain to have seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and are able to influence decisions taken by the government. Satisfied with the way the current rules work, and with the political influence they have under the actual electoral law, they see no reason to take on the risk of reform. Their prudence is reinforced by the high degree of uncertainty for in Romanian elections.

3.3 The impact of the historical and sociological context

Under the two previous headings, the trend towards less inclusive electoral legislation in Romania has been analysed by looking at its ideological and strategic determinants. These two factors are not the only variables to take into account. Contextual elements also intervene in the choice of an electoral law. In the Romanian case, the impact of the context was threefold in 1990. First, as Birch has shown, after the collapse of the communist regimes, reformers in Eastern and Central Europe were highly influenced by the institutional architecture of the democratic interwar period (Birch 2002). Having lots of things to reform in a short period of time, reformers have often reproduced the legislation in practice before 1940 (Ishiyama 1997). This contributed in Romania to the adoption of PR. Secondly, the sociological structure of the country also favoured proportional representation. With many ethnic minorities in Romania, having inclusive electoral rules was preferable. Finally, some elements of foreign influence were observed in 1990. First, Romania wanted to show that minorities were treated well in order to illustrate that the

country was truly a democracy. Moreover, advisors from the Council of Europe also pressed for PR in 1990 to follow the example of the transition in Latin America and in Spain, Portugal and Greece where PR had proven to help consolidate democracy in transition countries.

The question is how these contextual variables continue to work to shape the trend toward less inclusive electoral rules. First of all, it appears that the weight of history declines as time goes by. Parties in Romania appear to be less influenced by the interwar period than they used to be. The historical parties are less likely to present themselves and legitimize themselves by referring to their historical lineage. New political leaders less influenced by the democratic past of the country are taking the lead. Furthermore, having more time to debate, parties and MPs can take into consideration more options, a wider variety of electoral rules than they did in 1990. In that sense PR is less sacred, and can be amended to make it less inclusive. Like the weight of history, the impact of foreign influence is also fading away. Romania must prove its democratic character in order to be accepted as member of the EU. But this can be achieved with both PR and majoritarian rule.

Finally, the only contextual element that remains determinant is the sociological structure of Romania, and the presence of ethnic minorities in particular. An electoral threshold was introduced in 1996, and raised in 2000. But the guaranteed representation of ethnic minorities in the Chamber of Deputies has never been questioned. The electoral system may become less inclusive, but not for minorities. Parties representing ethnic minorities have made this clear: since they often support the ruling coalition, they have enough political influence to make their point. In the recent debate about a shift to majoritarian system, the UDMR representing the Hungarians is the biggest defender of PR (Popescu 2002). Presently, it is the main obstacle to the adoption of majoritarian systems.

Conclusion

In recent years, the collapse of communist regimes and the consequent electoral reforms in Eastern and Central Europe have contributed to the development of a new field of electoral studies. They have brought enough empirical elements to have a better insight on how electoral laws are passed, and on what influences the

attitudes of parties about electoral rules. From these cases, it appeared that mainly three types of factors condition electoral system changes. First, parties are looking for electoral rules that would maximize their political influence. Secondly, they try to translate their values, their conception of politics, and their model of democracy to the institutional architecture. Finally, the choice of parties does not operate in a vacuum; it is influenced by the context of where it takes place. In that sense, the democratic and political history of the country, the structure of society, the presence of minorities, and the influence of foreign examples are among other elements that have influenced actors involved in electoral reforms.

All these elements were present in Romania in 1990. First, strategies developed by parties were marked by a high degree of uncertainty. This uncertainty made it highly difficult for reformers to anticipate the distribution of votes. Therefore, parties were unable to play with the rules to find out what would maximize their political influence. In a context of uncertainty, they have opted for a very inclusive system: PR with a low threshold. As far as ideas and values were concerned, two elements were determinant in Romania after the fall of Ceausescu. First, pluralism and democracy were at that time synonyms. Multipartyism was seen as the expression of political freedom. Therefore, inclusive electoral rules allowing all political groups to be inserted within the parliamentary system were perceived positively. The second concern was to consolidate the parties. In order to help parties become strong organisations that could stabilize the new democracy, PR with closed lists was chosen. Finally, contextual elements also supported the choice of proportional representation. One important element was the positive perception of the democratic interwar period when PR was used. Secondly, the presence of ethnic minorities in Romania also pointed the way to choosing PR. By adopting an electoral system allowing minorities to be represented, Romania was showing to the outside world that it had been democratized and pacified its internal political scene pacified. Finally, foreign experts present in 1990 pushed for PR as the best choice for a transition democracy.

More than fifteen years later, the electoral law chosen for the first Romanian elections has been amended several times. The general trend is to go for less inclusive rules. In 1992, a 3% threshold was adopted. In 2000, it was raised to 5%

for parties and 8% to 10% for alliances. Recently, the PSD has proposed to go one step further and to shift to two-round run-off elections. The general idea is to reduce the fragmentation of parliamentary representation in Romania. The question for political science is to determine how these changes can be explained. How can theories of electoral reforms help to understand it? Moreover, do these reforms bring new elements in our understanding of electoral system changes?

Three elements can be underlined. First, within 15 years, the model of democracy, the values that were dominant in the mind of political parties have evolved. Pluralism and multipartism are no longer seen as necessarily positive. The fragmentation of parliamentary representation and the extremely high number of parties have become problems for more and more Romanian politicians and political observers. As a consequence, restricted pluralism has become the new ideal. Reducing the number of parties is now perceived as positive and new regulations such as the threshold have been adopted. The second evolution in the prevailing model of democracy in Romania is that parties are perceived less positively than they used to be. Instead, candidates and MPs are asking for autonomy. Single parties are the new ideal. Proposals for preferential electoral systems and for single-member elections are the consequences of this change.

A second important evolution is that the attitude of Romanian parties has evolved in a context marked by a high uncertainty about the next elections. In 1990, unable to anticipate the outcome of the upcoming elections and the impact of electoral rules, parties followed the precautionary principle. They chose inclusive electoral rules. As time went by, the prudence of Romanian parties has declined. Uncertainty remains high, but parties are now willing to take the risk of adopting less inclusive electoral rules. The PSD even proposes the adoption of a risky majoritarian system.

Finally, contextual factors that favoured PR, like positive perceptions of the interwar institutional architecture, and some forms of foreign pressure, have lost their influence. The only contextual variable that still defends proportional representation is the presence of politically influential ethnic minorities. These appear to be the last defenders of PR in a country more and more tempted by majoritarian

rule. The question is how long they will be able to oppose a reform pushed by adventurous parties that are ready to take on the risk of reform.

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