

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM IN ROMANIA: A MANAGERIAL APPROACH

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Abstract: The electoral system in Romania has undergone profound transformations since 1989, shaping both the political architecture and the functioning of democratic institutions. This literature review synthesizes the main academic contributions regarding Romania's semi-presidential regime, the evolution of electoral rules, and the applicability of Duverger's theory on the mechanical and psychological effects of electoral systems.

Keywords: management, digital, electoral campaign, voter segmentation, political communication.

1. Introduction

The analysis shows that Romania exhibits a mitigated form of semi-presidentialism, where the influence of the president fluctuates depending on political majorities and electoral timing. The proportional electoral system encourages multipartism, legislative fragmentation, and strategic party behavior. Structural inconsistencies between constitutional design, electoral mechanisms, and political practice generate recurring episodes of institutional instability.

This review highlights key theoretical perspectives and proposes future research directions concerning managerial efficiency, political decision-making, and potential electoral reform in Romania. In the context of political competitiveness and diversified communication channels, the efficiency of electoral management can determine the difference between electoral success and failure.

In actual elections, some candidates are more popular or simply better known than others.

2. Theoretical Background

In order to determine which political system is more suitable for Romania, it is essential to clarify the fundamental distinctions between the parliamentary system and the semi-presidential one. A key difference lies in the relationship between the legislative and executive branches. In a parliamentary framework, the Government's survival depends directly on the support of a parliamentary majority, which generally ensures coherence between legislative decisions and executive action. By contrast, the semi-presidential system does not automatically generate such a majority in Parliament, a situation that may give rise to institutional deadlock and political instability.

Another important distinction concerns electoral mechanisms. Within parliamentary systems, elections

are typically unified, as citizens vote for a legislature that subsequently gives rise to the executive. In semi-presidential regimes, however, the President and the Parliament are elected through separate electoral processes. The direct election of the President, often conducted under a winner-takes-all logic, confers a strong plebiscitary dimension on the presidential office. Moreover, the timing of elections differs considerably: while parliamentary systems allow the head of government to call early elections under certain conditions, semi-presidential systems generally impose constitutionally fixed electoral calendars.

A further divergence can be observed in the interaction between political institutions and the party system. In parliamentary regimes, the prime minister is usually both the leader of the governing majority and the head of the dominant political party, acting as an intermediary between party structures and executive authority. Conversely, in semi-presidential systems, the President is not necessarily affiliated with or leading the strongest political party, as electoral success may depend more heavily on individual appeal and personal credibility. As a result, political parties may play a less central role in shaping executive power.

Finally, a distinguishing feature of semi-presidential systems is the constitutional limitation on presidential mandates. When combined with direct elections, term limits can facilitate the regular renewal of political elites, contributing to periodic changes in leadership at the highest level of the state.

3. Literature Review

Within a parliamentary system, the functioning of the central administration is often characterized by a higher degree of continuity and institutional stability. This model places the Parliament at the core of political decision-making, turning it into the primary arena in which governance is exercised. The executive authority,

headed by a prime minister endowed with extensive competencies, remains directly accountable to the legislative body. Consequently, Parliament retains the power to revoke its support whenever it judges that the Government has failed to adequately carry out its responsibilities, a process that can be initiated without excessive procedural constraints.

The President of the Republic has a more symbolic power, having representative and protocol duties, in comparison with the prominent position of the prime minister. However, the President of the Republic may act successfully in times of crisis, when he is in fact the one who will grant the mandate to the future prime minister; such an option cannot be made arbitrarily, because the President may put forward a nomination only after having the endorsement of the political forces and will have to confront them.

One aspect that influenced the perception of the two systems in Romania was the coincidence of presidential and parliamentary elections for five consecutive electoral rounds, which placed Romania in a unique situation worldwide. The 2003 Constitution solved this problem, but only the repeated practice of separate elections will be able to influence the paternalistic mentality of citizens, reinforced by this unfortunate coincidence.

The semi-presidential system represents a synthesis between the parliamentary and presidential models, incorporating characteristics specific to both, which is why it is generally regarded not as an entirely distinct system, but rather as a hybrid form of governance [2]. In order to clarify this institutional arrangement, I will outline in a schematic manner the main features of both the parliamentary and the presidential systems.

France is commonly cited as a representative example of this model. In contrast to countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, the French political system has experienced numerous constitutional transformations over time. Nevertheless, the foundations of the current system can be traced back to the principles established by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. The Constitution presently in force was adopted in 1958. It is worth noting that the concept of “semi-presidentialism” was first introduced by M. Duverger to describe a political system (such as the contemporary French system, known as that of the “Fifth Republic”) in which a president elected by universal suffrage operates alongside a prime minister and a Cabinet that are accountable to the legislative branch. Due to the coexistence of these dual institutional elements, this form of governance has occasionally been described as involving a “semi-separation of powers” [3].

The President has a series of important prerogatives, even if he does not have the right of veto, as in the presidential system: he appoints the prime minister; only he can submit a bill to a referendum; he

can dissolve the National Assembly (one of the two Chambers of Parliament, the other being the Senate). On the other hand, the division of the Executive through the existence of the position of prime minister, as well as the responsibility of the Government before Parliament, constitute elements specific to the parliamentary system.

The system of government adopted in Romania through the 1991 Constitution, revised in 2003, falls within the characteristics of the semi-presidential system. On the one hand, the president is elected by direct universal suffrage; on the other hand, the Executive is dual, through the existence of the position of prime minister, and the Government is politically responsible before the Parliament for its entire activity. The status of deputy or senator is compatible with that of member of the Government. There are a series of levers through which the president's prerogatives are limited by the Parliament (for example: the president designates a candidate for the position of prime minister, but only on the basis of the vote of confidence granted by the Parliament). Similarly, the head of state has the authority to call on citizens to express their will through a referendum on matters of national importance, though this prerogative may be exercised only after prior consultation with Parliament. The president also holds the power to dissolve the legislative body, but this action is subject to consultations with the presidents of both Chambers and the leaders of the parliamentary groups, particularly in situations where Parliament has refused to grant its confidence to the Government.

Research examining the effects of electoral laws has traditionally approached these laws as external variables influencing the configuration of party systems, even when scholars acknowledge that political parties themselves often play an active role in designing electoral institutions so as to serve their strategic interests.

Duverger's well-known assertion that “the single-ballot simple-majority system favors the two-party system” prompted an extensive body of empirical research aimed at exploring the relationship between electoral arrangements and the number of political parties operating within a given political system. [4] From a theoretical standpoint, this relationship is explained through a dual mechanism by which institutions influence party systems, involving “two forces working together: a mechanical factor and a psychological factor.” The mechanical component refers to the manner in which electoral rules translate votes into parliamentary seats, thereby limiting or facilitating representation, whereas the psychological component relates to how political actors and voters adjust their strategies in anticipation of the constraints imposed by electoral procedures [5].

Analyses focused on mechanical effects treat the number of parties that successfully obtain parliamentary representation as a dependent variable, using features of the electoral system most commonly district magnitude

as key explanatory factors. By contrast, studies addressing psychological effects emphasize the role of electoral rules in shaping party competition, the intensity of contestation for seats, and patterns of vote distribution, all of which may be influenced by elements such as ethnic divisions [6] or the nature and scheduling of presidential elections [7].

4. Critical Discussion

Empirical research conducted over time has failed to demonstrate a clear-cut separation between the two categories of effects identified in the literature [8], nor has it sufficiently addressed the theoretical consequences of these mechanisms for empirical modeling. In the absence of a precise distinction between the mechanical (or automatic) effect and the psychological effect, analyses tend to prioritize the assessment of the automatic dimension. However, given that the psychological effect is rooted in expectations regarding the automatic effect, any misinterpretation of the latter may lead to a distorted understanding of the former. Such distortions can have significant implications for political actors seeking to anticipate the outcomes generated by different electoral systems in order to enhance their competitiveness. This concern is particularly relevant in electoral contexts where party configurations may be influenced prior to the institutional framework, as decision-makers are especially interested in the extent to which electoral rules can reduce the number of political parties through purely automatic mechanisms.

Electoral rules operate through a dual mechanism:

1. first, by shaping the number of parties that enter electoral competition and the degree of vote concentration they achieve, and subsequently by regulating the conversion of votes into parliamentary mandates. In non-technical terms, the votes that are ultimately transformed into seats through the automatic effect have already been “filtered” by the psychological effect, as both voters and parties adjust their behavior based on their understanding of how electoral rules influence the probability of securing representation;
2. second, any empirical observation of the automatic effect inevitably incorporates the impact of the psychological effect.

The model proposed below departs from earlier approaches by addressing the mechanical and psychological effects within a unified structural framework and by allowing for direct control over the outcomes of this endogenous (internal) relationship.

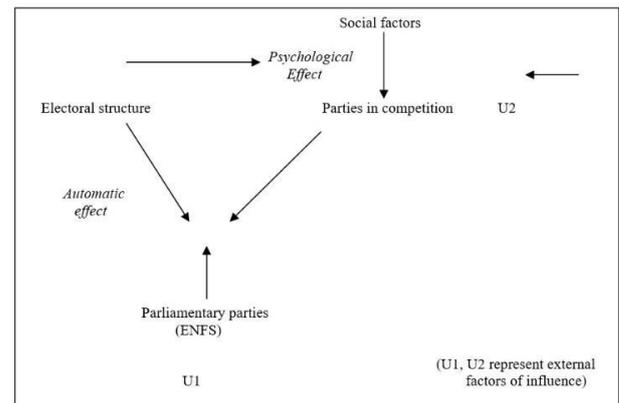


Fig. 1. The model of Duverger's two effects

Non-structural empirical assessments of Duverger's automatic effect tend to be favored, as they generate more robust findings than those obtained through a purely mechanical application of electoral rules. This preference is justified by the fact that electoral systems influence parties that gain parliamentary representation in two distinct ways: first, through the conversion of votes into seats, and second, by shaping the composition of the vote itself [5].

In early democratic contexts, such as Romania's situation in 1990, the separate examination of these effects reveals that when party systems are “pre-filtered” by electoral constraints, electoral outcomes may appear proportional, even though institutional arrangements exert a clear influence on the number of parties represented in Parliament. Under such circumstances, the primary concern of those responsible for designing electoral legislation is not the theoretical issues related to voting behavior or party entry and exit, which define the psychological effect, but rather the resulting number of political parties within the legislature. The present analysis is therefore centered on the Duvergerian effects of electoral laws. The perspective outlined above helps clarify these effects and redirects attention to what is most relevant: the psychological impact of electoral rules on both political parties and voters.

In the aftermath of the events of 1989, the institutional framework of the communist state was dismantled, paving the way for the re-establishment of political pluralism. The Romanian Communist Party ceased to exist, political parties that had operated prior to 1947 re-emerged in revised forms, and numerous new parties were created [9].

The Constitution adopted in 2003, together with the electoral legislation enacted in 2008, laid down explicit procedures governing the election of Parliament, the President of Romania, mayors, prefects, and county council presidents.

One of the central themes arising from the analysis of electoral processes concerns the relationship between electoral constituencies and the degree to which decision-making power is individualized among political

actors. Taking into account the interactions between political actors, over the scale of an electoral cycle convenient strategies may be developed, by supporting, cultivating, or even inventing political formations that fragment the traditional electorate of opponents, which may bring an indirect gain through the reallocation of mandates [10].

Another issue is the overly high density of some parties on a clearly defined spectrum, such as, for example, the liberal one [11]. The problem of fractionalization, in the case at hand, returns “to estimating the objective side of the answer to the question: how many relevant poles exist in the liberal component and which are they?”. We are not interested, in the context developed here, in how this problem can be resolved. The cited author has done this and it is sufficient to know that such an estimation can be carried out. The practical importance is related to the fact that these analyses are of great help for optimizing the strategy used by political actors in order to obtain the best possible representation. This is the point I wished to emphasize.

5. Conclusions

This review highlights key theoretical perspectives and proposes future research directions concerning managerial efficiency, political decision-making, and potential electoral reform in Romania.

In general, when discussing strategies in an electoral campaign, the aim is to identify the ways to attract as many votes as possible, but these are only the direct ones. It is forgotten, most of the time, that the objective, specific to each actor, can also be achieved through the orchestration of indirect methods (fragmenting the opponent’s electorate may bring greater gains through reallocation than a higher electoral score). The issue must be treated with great caution because perverse effects may also appear.

The analysis of the differences between the parliamentary system and the semi-presidential one shows that the distribution of power between institutions directly influences the stability of governance. The parliamentary system depends on the cohesion of the parliamentary majority, while the semi-presidential system combines a directly elected president with a government responsible before the Parliament, which can generate both cooperation and blockages.

The texts highlight the central role of electoral laws, explained through Duverger’s two effects, automatic and psychological, which act simultaneously on the party system. The electoral strategies of parties

are influenced not only by the way votes are transformed into seats, but also by the anticipation of these mechanisms, which can lead to both the fragmentation of the electorate and the emergence of new political formations.

In conclusion, the management of an electoral campaign requires a balance between strategy, communication, resource management, and continuous adaptation to the dynamics of the political environment. The use of data and modern communication tools, combined with a well-organized and motivated team, significantly increases the chances of electoral success.

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