Political Participation in Romania

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Abstract

Political participation is a key function of democracy (Hooghe and Quintelier 2014), and in Romania and its general region, institutional participation significantly decreased after the enthusiastic early post-communist period (Ekman, Gherghina and Podolian 2016). Since 2012, contentious politics (Tilly and Tarrow 2015) and other means of non-institutionalised participation forms have grown in Romania. Protests have been against authoritarian practices, environmental or corruption issues and have ranged from small-scale to mass protests. An analysis of their political consequences (Bosi, Giugni and Uba 2016) reveals that they resulted in primarily short-term effects. While causes of low turnout and protests receive regular academic interest, the effects of protests and new parties on voter turnout are often neglected. Indeed, this is a crucial issue; In 2016, a new anti-establishment party entered the political landscape, positioning itself as an alternative option for citizens voting in local and national elections. Thus, the research question asks to what extent has Romania’s recent rise of non-institutionalised political participation and a new anti-establishment party influenced institutionalised participation in 2016? A data set consisting of literature, media sources and most importantly expert interviews, suggests that the causes for a low turnout in Romania are numerous, including a ‘crisis of representation’ and a rather closed political system, corruption, disappointment and lack of confidence in politics, socio-economic aspects, emigration and residence. It also shows that both the anti-system party and the protests had an effect on Romanian politics – although not on turnout. The only visible effect has resulted from when protests were combined with elections in 2014.

Key words: Romania; south eastern; central eastern; post-communist; Europe; political participation; parties; protests
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Important Abbreviations

ACL – Christian-Liberal Alliance
ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats
CSO – Civil Society Organization
CVM – Cooperation and Verification Mechanism
DNA – Anti-corruption Agency
EVS – European Value Study
FDSN – Democratic Front of National Salvation
FSN – National Salvation Front
MP – Member of Parliament
MP – Popular Movement
PC – Conservative Party
PD – Democratic Party
PDL – Liberal Democratic Party
PDSR – Party of Social Democracy in Romania
PMP – People’s Movement Party
PNL – National Liberal Party
PRM – Greater Romania Party
PSD – Social Democratic Party
SMDs – Single Member Districts
UDMR – Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
USB – Union to Save Bucharest
USL – Social Liberal Union
USR – Union to Save Romania
WVS – World Value Survey
Although Romania has been considered for a long time as having a weak civil society and low political participation levels, the country has seen its biggest post-revolution protest episodes since 2012. In a region where political dissidence has generally increased (Jacobsson 2015b), most civic activism stems from triggered interest in contemporary political decisions (Marchenko 2016). An example of such were Romania’s February 2017 protests, when the Social Democratic Party (PSD) strived to decriminalize corrupt politicians in a further attempt to consolidate power and degrade the respected and to some extent also successful anti-corruption agency (DNA). Nonetheless, although Romania has faced issues with illiberal politics, its political status is not yet comparable to other countries in the region. Independent grassroots civil movements and social protests have been identified as crucial factors in countering these illiberal tendencies (Đihić and Hayoz 2016, 7–8).

In Romania, one could argue either that the years 2015–2016 brought multiple changes to the political landscape, or little to no change. The increase of citizen participation via non-institutionalized means (e.g. protests) has been outstanding and eventually led to the resignation of the former PM Victor Ponta as well as the formation of a technocratic government in 2015. Additionally, a former association from Bucharest transformed into a party (Uniunea Salvaţi Bucureştiu/România USB/USR) and accomplished respectable results as a newcomer, especially in the state’s capital. In addition to local elections, state-wide parliamentary elections also took place in December. Yet despite these events, one could see the resurrection of the Social Democrats (twice emerged as clear winner) as a continuation of regular Romanian politics.

It is worth noting a shy voter turnout of 40% in December and less than 50% in June, leading seven million people to elect a government responsible for more than 18 million Romanians. The lack of representation is omnipresent. Political inequality and low turnout leads to unequal political influence (Lijphart 1997). Generally, causal explanations of low institutional participation and growing protests include disenchantment, loss of political trust, and apathy. However, 2016 was the fourth consecutive year of increased protests, higher critical awareness, and a new anti-establishment party that positioned itself as a fresh alternative in the political system. USB/USR consisted of a range of citizens such as former politicians, civil society representatives, protesters, entrepreneurs etc. One could expect that the formation of a new party, in accordance with increased contentious activities, would increase institutional participation. A look at turnout in 2016 suggests otherwise. The question remains; in a country where corruption and a lack of political trust is among the key issues, why politically disengaged citizens do not vote for a new, anti-corruption, pro-transparency party?
Recapitulating these preliminary findings, this thesis is guided by a main research question:

»To what extent has Romania’s recent rise of non-institutionalised political participation and a new anti-establishment party influenced institutionalised participation in 2016?«

This thesis seeks to find answers regarding the influence of non-institutionalised participation, both in terms of general (political) consequences and in terms of voter turnout. This focus considers protests as the main and most visible contentious action. In addition, this thesis discusses the support and effects of a new mainstream anti-establishment party as well as the impact such a party had on voter turnout.

Furthermore, low turnout, contentious actions and anti-establishment parties are of course not specific to Romanian politics, but can be found across post-communist and south-eastern Europe as well. Thus, this research inquiry on the Romanian context can also provide insights to the question of whether or not increased non-institutionalised participation and the formation of an anti-establishment party can enhance turnout across the region beyond the initial political consequences?

This is crucial, as widespread political participation lies at the heart of any democracy. In other words, a low participation rate is not only an indicator of people’s disenfranchisement with politics, but “seriously undermines the quality of the democratic process” (Kostelka 2014, 963).

**Political Participation – A Theoretic Background**

The main theoretical concept applied in this thesis is political participation. Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian (2016, 6) identify two key aspects of political participation to be analysed in eastern, post-communist, European countries. First, a rather broad definition of political participation is to be used, as it “encompasses a number of unconventional, infrequent and even ad hoc-based political activities” (Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian 2016, 6). This aspect has been agreed on by many participation researchers (see e.g. Brady 1999, Teorell, Torcal, and Ramon Montero 2007; Rucht 2012; Grasso 2016), and so political participation is understood as actions or activities by citizens directly influencing political outcomes. The second aspect regards sensitivity towards “the local context” as “the particularities of the post-socialist state – civil society – market relations” need to be kept in mind (Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian 2016, 6). Jacobsson (2015a) connects the particular post-communist-society context with rapid economic change, privatisation, commercialization, and inadequate state policies. Speaking to local context, Romania’s historical legacy establishes a different socio-historical background than one would find in western Europe (Grasso 2016, 21) in two particular ways. First, Romania’s socio-economic status, including its many inequalities, differentiates it from western Europe. This status – with corresponding political participation attitudes and skills – is inheritable (Quintelier and Hooghe 2013, 275–76). Second, Romania’s political
culture contributes strongly to the way individuals perceive politics (Cartocci 2011) and thus either further strengthens or weakens participation levels.

Political participation research consists of a variety of arguments on ways to differentiate between conventional/unconventional, electoral/non-electoral, and institutionalized/non-institutionalized participation. Lamprianou (2013, 22–27) extensively discusses the teleological and praxeological aspects of distinguishing conventional/unconventional participation, concluding that it is “probably outdated and needs to be radically redefined”. Furthermore, the wide variety of what scholars understand as non-traditional participation has heavily extended in the last decades. Again, Lamprianou (2013, 27) differentiates between unofficial or non-institutional (Dalton 2008), extreme or unorthodox, (Bourne 2010) and alternative or informal (Riley, Griffin, and Morey 2010) activities. It is important to note that illegal activities (such as spontaneous protests, civil disobedience, etc.) and political violence (riots, shooting at policemen, looting etc.) are part of non-institutionalized forms of participation. Political violence – while it is part of the academic analysis and generally attracts more media attention – should not be understood as a legitimate form of democratic participation.

This research will follow the distinction made by Hooghe and Quintelier (2014, 216); Institutionalized participation is organized by the political elite or the system while non-institutionalized refers to elite-challenging practices. The former happens within the political system or in close vicinity thereof (voting, party membership, contacting a politician, etc.), while non-institutional participants “keep some distance from the political system by trying to have an indirect impact on political decision making or by circumventing the political system altogether” (Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010, 188).

Rucht (2012) sees participation occurring in three ‘frameworks of participation’: 1) party politics and voting behaviour, 2) interest group politics and 3) social movement and protest politics. In the study at hand, the first and third frameworks are studied, as research on interest group politics – as interesting and valuable as it would be – is beyond the scope of this thesis. Within Rucht’s conceptualisation, protests by social movements and other non-state actors play an essential role for political participation in a democracy.

These non-institutionalized activities (informal activities, protests, social movements, voluntary organisations etc.) form an essential part of the theoretical concept “contentious politics” by Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 235–44), which is at the core of analysing the protests in Romania between 2012 and 2017. Within their pivotal study Contentious Politics, contentious episodes encompass description (conditions), identification (streams of contention), and specification (outcomes) in order to deconstruct processes and mechanisms in play in a particular episode (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 115). These processes, like mobilisation or scale-shift, help to analyse the development of protests and contentious politics embedded in a dynamic context. A more detailed account of this concept’s theoretical background, including the analysis of

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For a discussion on illegal and legal participation see e.g. Lavrič (2011).
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outcomes and political consequences (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016; Amenta et al. 2010) will be presented in the second chapter.

When looking at political institutions and actions in combination with protests, scholars highlighted the advantage of an interdisciplinary approach towards an analysis of social movements and political contention (Císař 2015), especially drawing from sociology and political science. Political science is important “in understanding the close link between political institutions and social movements, and how politics matters in shaping social movements in different contexts” (Andretta 2013a). In general, this thesis has a stronger focus on political aspects, as it looks at the effects that protests and a new party may have on voter turnout. It thus attempts to contribute to research on political participation and contentious politics, with a particular focus on political rather than social aspects.

Method

The research follows question-driven “interpretative methods”, which are based on subjectivity and experience and thus require constant reflection on the researcher’s expectations and background throughout the process (Yanow 2009, 429–430; 436). First, one must do one’s homework; A qualitative comparison of existing secondary literature about the general background – the historic development and the current context – is done. This also includes the collection of data available online regarding protests and political participation. The key aspect of the interpretative method in this thesis is the fieldwork done in Romania, including “conversational interviewing” as well as the collection of “research-relevant documents”. This research design is built by “deliberate care in identifying, considering, and selecting” documents and persons, conducting interviews, and analysing (Yanow 2009, 433;436). Documents, studies and reports were collected and are crucial additions to the interviews (Meuser and Nagel 2009a, 471).

The primary focus lies on conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews with experts. The purpose of these interviews is to generate theory through aggregated expertise (i.e. point of view, patterns of explanation) based on subjective experiences in both the private and professional lives of the interviewees (Bogner and Menz 2009, 47–48). This enables the investigation of the underlying causes of the phenomenon at hand. The semi-structured expert interviews require “a process-oriented analytical view on expert knowledge”, including awareness regarding the socio-cultural setting, the habitus, the networks, and the private and public spheres of the expert (Meuser and Nagel 2009b, 30–31). As every expert provides heterogeneous and subjective knowledge, it only becomes “interpretative knowledge” as a “result of an act of abstraction and systematization” – this “analytic construction” takes places through interpretation by the researcher (Bogner and Menz 2009, 52–53). The accumulated data is not only “expert knowledge”, but also a product of the social interaction between researcher and interviewer, therefore aspects such as expectations, empathy, quality, skills, and gender must be considered (Littig 2011, 1345). Field notes after the interview are thus complementary in the reflection process and the analysis.
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The advantage of semi-structured interviews are the researcher’s preparation, the flexibility of follow-up questions, and the generation of comparable qualitative data (Cohen and Crabtree 2008). A person is named an expert if the researcher considers the person to have a particular knowledge in the field of interest that also maintains “a socially relevant dimension” and has “the power to produce practical effects” (Bogner and Menz 2009, 54). This expertise can come either from the professional background (e.g. university employees) or through active participation in relevant organisations (e.g. NGO for democratic education) – the selection should encompass various perspectives (Meuser and Nagel 2009a, 466–70). Altogether, fifteen interviews were carried out until re-occurring answers were repeatedly encountered.

There are obstacles in conducting qualitative interviews. First, potential candidates must be identified. Time and resource intensive interviews must then be scheduled. Next, a critical mind towards the experts is needed as given answers may contain socially desired or misleading information, and experts’ social or political background may not line up with the particular research field (Pickel and Pickel 2009, 253–254). It is equally important to reflect on the personal bias of the researcher during interviews. This critical approach is necessary in order to formulate the right questions and relevant follow-up questions. The semi-structured interview guideline can be found in the appendix, together with the allocation of categories and transcripts of the interviews. These have been filtered and only relevant information was recorded in the minutes.

Furthermore, quantitative data was used to illustrate some aspects, but was not part of empirical fieldwork research. For instance, survey data from Eurobarometer or Romanian surveys helped shape the context and interpretation. Primary sources were used for voter turnout analysis.

Literature Review and Chapter Outlook

The third and last chapter of this thesis discusses political participation. It is divided into several subchapters and is mostly based on interview material and literature, focusing on institutional participation levels (3.1) and the causes for low turnout (3.2). In addition, it investigates the effects of non-institutionalised participation (3.3), the effects of a new anti-establishment party (3.4) and their influence on voter turnout (3.5). The conclusion also discusses the Romanian case put in perspective to the wider central eastern and south-eastern European region.

Political participation as a concept became important decades ago. One seminal study undertaken by Verba and Nie (1987, first published 1972), who shaped the “classical” understanding of political action. Another one was Barnes et al.’s (1979) Political Action, introducing the concepts of conventional and unconventional participation. This opened the floor to non-traditional forms as well. Yet for quite some time to come, the focus remained on electoral participation and voting. While the application of the
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Conventional/unconventional (traditional/new) differentiation of political participation is being used by scholars until today (see for instance Grasso 2016), it has also seen criticism. Teorell, Torcal, and Ramon Montero (2007, 343) go beyond the conventional/unconventional dichotomy due to distinctions regarding their understanding of participation, but also claiming that this approach is “too historically relative”, as unconventional participation can become conventional as well. Hooghe (2010, 205–6) argues that this differentiation has become blurred as politicians rely on unconventional forms and new political activism, political consumerism (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005), or Social Media. Kostelka (2014, 946) even argues that the conventional/unconventional conception is misleading in the analysis of a post-communist country, as political participation has turned from unconventional practices towards conventional during the democratisation phase.

In general, the research on political participation has been growing over the last decades, mostly focusing on “established” democracies. This increase of research introduces concerns regarding the decline of liberal democracies, in particular civic engagement, low turnout, and low trust etc. (Putnam 2000; Dalton 2014). These fears have also found some counterarguments, stating that the evolution of citizens to be more critical does not necessarily lead to a hollowed democracy (Norris 2002; Berger 2009). A notable recent research project has been Grasso’s (2016) work on generational differences in participation behaviour. Many of these contributions offer valuable insight into the general theoretical and methodical background of participation research, but Romania’s socio-political history is not comparable to those of “established” democracies – an aspect noted by Barnes (2006, 77), who stated that the different context of new democracies is important when studying participation.

Research on political participation in the post-communist region of Europe has only recently expanded (Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian 2016). Most research has focused on either institutionalised participation (Kostelka 2014) or highlighted the low levels of non-institutionalised participation during the transformation (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007). Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian (2016, 4) argue that this negative conception of an inactive civil society diminishes if engagement in non-institutionalised activities is included. Burean and Badescu (2014) contributed to political participation research in Romania by looking at student protest participation. Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuş (2009) looked into the voter turnout decline between 1990 and 2008.

The main non-institutionalized form of political participation observed in Romania’s recent years has been protest, which thus deserves a special focus. Therefore, the second chapter focuses on contentious politics in Romania and looks into mechanisms and processes of the episodes between 2012 and 2017. It first discusses contentious politics (Tilly and Tarrow 2015) from a theoretical point of view (2.1), highlighting the importance of the dynamic turn (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). Cheskin and March (2015, 266) further distinguish contention theoretically and for this analysis dissentful contention (“contention with anti-regime motivation”) is central, although Romania has also recently seen small-scale pro-government
protests. In the next subchapter, Parau (2008) and Lambru (2017) provide a thorough overview of the development of civil society since 1989 (2.2). The main episodes are presented (2012-2.3., 2013-2.4., 2014/2015-2.5., 2017-2.6.) with the support of a variety of means, such as an academic analysis (an overview e.g. by Margarit (2016b) both in terms of published articles and online analysis. Furthermore, media, including articles, videos, and interview material, are also utilized. The subsequent analysis (2.7) focuses on general outcomes. Here, Bosi, Giugni, and Uba (2016) refer to framework and political consequences in particular (Amenta et al. 2010). In the last subchapter (2.8), the new party is presented and discussed, supported primarily by Hanley and Sikk’s (2014) analysis of anti-establishment parties. At this moment, there are no general works applying contentious politics analysis to the case of Romania, and even less research has been conducted regarding the recently emerged new party.

Hooghe and Quintelier (2014) claim that the existing low institutional participation levels speak to authoritarian legacy, low-income levels and – particularly for Romania – public perceptions of corruption and bad governance, both having a “strong negative impact”. Additionally, Bernhagen and Marsh (2007, 56–65) suggest that turnout is based on individual-level causes in both post-communist and western Europe. Personal experience matters. They also find that, when analysing protest participation, it is necessary to note the particular pre-democratic regime type as well as the type of democratic transformation. As such, this thesis begins with a general overview of Romania’s development since 1989. Thus, the first chapter investigates the transformation period and looks at the legacies remaining. This includes the political system and parties (1.1), but also the problematic transformation process (1.2). It also discusses the current status quo in terms of socio-economic status (1.4) and political culture (1.3), as both shape political participation.

Three volumes give interesting first insights, although for obvious reasons, parts of the older ones are outdated. Romania since 1989 by Carey (2004) and Post-Communist Romania by Light and Phinnemore (2001) deal with the first post-communist decade. Stan and Vancea’s (2015b) Post-Communist Romania at Twenty-Five is a very actual volume on the development since 1989, discussing several aspects that have yet to receive such attention. Furthermore, Gallagher’s (1996, 2001, 2005) analysis of the transformation period is noteworthy. Another volume analyses Romania’s path towards the EU (Phinnemore 2006). The impact of the EU accession has been highlighted (Pridham 2007), in particular the judicial reforms (Mendelski 2012) and the post-accession conditionality, critically assessing Romania’s continuing issues with rule of law and corruption (Gateva 2013). In regard to the political system, a general account was made by Gabanyi (2004), and Sedelius and Mashtaler’s (2013) work of semi-presidentialism is crucial as this system is considered to be “predisposed to conflicts between the president, parliament and government” (Marinescu 2016, 74). Volintiru (2012) discusses the institutionalisation of the party system and Preda (2013) provides an overview over parties and elections. Pop-Eleches (2008) highlights the catch-all
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characteristics of the parties, Crowther and Suciu (2013) focus on the cartelisation. The importance of socio-economic aspects on politics and participation are discussed (Cernat 2010; Precupețu 2013), and Țăra (2013) points to the differences in political, social and economic inequalities. The analysis by Cinpoes (2015) is the key work regarding the political culture of participation in Romania.

Thus, a two-fold research gap can be identified. First, both the protest episodes and the new party in Romania have not yet received much scholarly attention, which can be explained by their recent occurrences. Second, the impact of these occurrences on voter turnout is considerably under researched, although non-voting should receive more academic attention, as it is the fastest growing group of voters (Oxenham 2017). While non-institutionalised forms are refreshing democracy and participation, politics, in the current democratic system, is still mostly developed in institutional settings and if non-voters continue to grow in numbers, the democratic quality will further diminish. The implications are far-reaching, not only for a country under investigation, but for a representative democracy in general. This thesis is an attempt to look into the particular case of Romania and concludes that the effects of protests and a new anti-establishment party on voter turnout seem to be non-existent.
1 Transformation Legacies – What is Left? What is New?

“Twenty years after the collapse of communism, a rough consensus in the literature on post-communist politics is that the past matters. Many questions remain, however, about exactly how, when, and why the past matters.” (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013, 46)

The past matters and legacies, which can be defined as something transmitted from the past, also matter (Merriam-Webster n.d.). This chapter looks at the legacies of the post-communist transformation that are still visible in Romania’s politics today, and what has changed since the 1990s. When analysing civic or political participation in post-communist countries, the authoritarian history, but more so the transformation process, is important to consider. Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2013, 63–64) showed that three legacies are particularly relevant whenever civic participation is a central research focus: the socio-demographic profile, the socialization and oppression under communism, and the economic conditions during the transformation. While their quantitative data analysis suggests that the political situation of the transformation is less relevant, the opposite is true when looking at Romania’s participation levels. Not only has Romania’s transformation generation grown up accustomed to a society where social and political distrust dominated, but it has also experienced semi-authoritarian politics in the 1990s. This chapter emphasizes a more qualitative approach by analysing the ways in which the transformation process unfolded, particularly regarding political aspects.

Gross (2015, 128) highlights Romania’s many hopes for improvement in the last two-and-a-half decades. The revolution, the first democratic elections in 1996, the election of president Băsescu in 2004, EU-accession in 2007, and Iohannis’ win in the 2014 presidential elections can be seen as such new beginnings. However, each of these new starts was followed by setbacks, giving rise to popular dissatisfaction and voter disenfranchisement – two factors that fundamentally weaken the base of a functioning and representative democracy. Thus, Ciobanu (2015, 260) notes that Romania’s transformation “into a stable, functional, and prosperous democracy still remains an incomplete project”. Why? The impact and legacies of the transformation period are still visible and, thus far, the country has yet to see a substantive bottom-up democratisation process.

The next three parts of this chapter will discuss a variety of these post-transformation legacies, posing questions as to how they affected the political system in Romania (1.1), how they impacted the political development (1.2), and how they influenced the country’s political culture and socio-economic status in general (1.3). These elements present the necessary background for any further analysis regarding political participation in Romania. The conclusion (1.4) of this chapter discusses whether these legacies are still of importance or if they should be dismissed into the past.
1 Transformation Legacies

1.1 Political System and Main Parties

In this part, Romania’s political system and its key parties is at the centre of analysis. As the two following sub-chapters will show, the transformation has had an important effect on both the functioning of the political system as well as the main parties. Parties in Romania often switch amongst themselves, build alliances, and fragment. They are rarely based on consistent programs or ideology. It is also important to note Romania’s semi-presidential system, its two-chamber parliament, and its electoral law. Briefly put, Romania’s political system is considered as “predisposed to conflicts between the president, parliament and government” (Marinescu 2016, 74). Democracy, political system, institutions, and parties are in place in Romania, but politics is “a game of democratic form without substance, of representatives without representation” (King and Marian 2015, 166).

1.1.1 Political System

The Romanian republic, designed after the French republic, is a “premier-presidential” system, which encompasses a president that is elected by popular vote and who subsequently appoints the prime minister heading the cabinet. Meanwhile, parliament retains authority over the cabinet (Sedelius and Mashtaler 2013, 110). Due to the constitution and this power-sharing system in Romania, authors consider the term semi-presidential as misleading and rather define the system as, inter alia, a “mixed parliament-presidential system” (Gabanyi 2004, 560).

Romania had experienced hierarchical structures and power systems before. Therefore, it comes less a surprise that in 1991, when the new Constitution was approved via referendum, citizens accepted the semi-presidential system that was proposed by the government and the Constitution drafters. The reasoning behind establishing a system that resembles that of the French republic can be found in the historic proximity between Romanian intelligentsia and France. As mentioned before, the government during this period consisted of authoritarian rulers who lacked democratic principles, or any interest such principles. Thus, Iliescu and his apparatchik were able to decide on the system that best fit their agenda of re-shaping the post-communist country according to their interests (Stan and Vancea 2015a, 194–95). A constitutional reform took place in light of EU and NATO membership in 2003, where further democratisation due to the inclusion of civil society was achieved.²

The presidential office allows a person to serve two mandates that, since 2004, lasts for five years instead of four per term. According to Stan and Vancea (2015a, 196), Romanians often overestimate the power of the president, as the power that is vested by the Constitution is more limited than in other semi-presidential systems (cf. also Gabanyi 2004, 561–64). Nonetheless, as the office is directly elected, it is

² For a more detailed account on Romania’s constitution, including the constitutional reform in 2003 see Gabanyi (2004, 556–60).
widely considered the most important position in the country and would potentially allow for a misuse of power (Fati 2000, 2). The parliament maintains the power to suspend the president while electorate has the final vote via referendum, and can even impeach him in cases of “high treason” with the final decision relying on the Supreme Court. In the last 27 years, a suspension has occurred twice: in both instances, it was the PSD which brought down president Băsescu (2007, 2012) through the parliament (majority in both chambers), and twice Romanians kept him in office – the second time only as a result of an insufficient turnout (under 50%) (Stan and Vancea 2015a, 196).

Since the election-term-change in 2004, the President and the prime minister represent different parties – a situation that makes cooperation difficult and can lead to “policy deadlock” (Stan and Vancea 2015a, 213–14). The discrepancies between the viewpoints of Romanian president and prime minister between 2012 and 2014 have only intensified due to high polarization and lack of regular public debate (Cinpoeş 2015, 112).

The two-chamber parliament, consisting of the Chamber of Deputies (Camera Deputafilor) and the Senate (Senat), is elected by general parliamentary elections every four years. It includes particular minority seats for those not exceeding the threshold. The government directs legislative initiatives to both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, depending on the issue at hand, which then in turn must be approved by the other chamber. Every five years, parliament appoints an Ombudsman (Avocatul Poporului), which reports and recommends to the parliament yearly. The President appoints the prime minister after consultation with the party/alliance/coalition that has achieved a majority, who is then approved by the parliament. In accordance with the parliament, the prime minister and the ministers are responsible for the government program (Gabanyi 2004, 564–567).

In general, Romania’s parliament is characterized by highly centralized and informal party practices, high turnover rates of MPs (party switching), and MPs mostly either coming from (financially) strong Bucharest networks (“parachutes”) or local patronage. Gherghina (2016, 499) showed that one out of five defecting MPs gets re-elected, but mostly when switching from smaller to bigger parties. There have always been plans to reduce the huge amount of parliamentarians, due to their high salaries, general unpopularity and their constant party-migration (Gabanyi 2004, 567). From 1990–2008 and again since 2015, elections have been based on a proportional representation (PR) system in constituencies (42 counties) with people voting for party lists (Pelin and Popescu 2015). Since 2000, parties needed a 5% threshold to enter parliament, while alliances – based on the numbers of parties – had to cross 8-10% (Gabanyi 2004, 573–575).

Between 2008 and 2015, the electoral system changed to a mixed system, adding a diaspora constituency (Ştefan and Grecu 2014, 195). Scholars, who have been analysing the electoral reform and its impact, concluded that not much had changed. Chiru and Ciobanu (2009, 205–206; 226) argued that it only
increased the likelihood of more “patronage-oriented recruitment”. King and Marian (2015, 149–54) noted that while the new electoral system had offered “significant incentives” for MPs to work for and represent their constituency, Romanian politics was still largely “centralized and focused on Bucharest affairs”, where hierarchical parties dominated. Most notable are the findings of Marian and King (2010, 7; 15), who based on quantitative data analysis from the 2008 elections, found that the change had no impact at all – it was just complicating an already complicated electoral system. While individual accountability was increased, the representation did not. According to Preda (2013, 51–53), Romania’s PR-system has been among the most disproportional in regards to the redistribution of votes of parties that did not enter parliament, making the system non-representative.\(^3\) Thus, Giugăl et al. (2017, 17) interestingly noted that parties collaborated during a reform process in 2008, whereas usually gerrymandering advantages one party: “[E]ach party was able to create (i.e., gerrymander) stronghold districts where its probability of success at general elections was high”.

This lack of legitimacy and representation, intensified by the electoral system, leads to further distortion of the political system, undermining democratic quality in Romania (Ștefan and Grecu 2014, 212–13). Kostadinova (2003, 755–56) also demonstrated the importance of the political and electoral system for turnout in the post-communist region. It can be concluded that the institutional issues of Romania’s system can be traced back to its establishment, with the addition that many issues have been ignored or inadequately addressed by reforms.

### 1.1.2 Parties

Political parties are “important institutions ensuring political participation” due to their “political functions such as aggregation or articulation of interest and political socialization” (Cabada 2013, 77). In Romania, the well-known mainstream parties are considered to be catch-all, as are cartel parties. Catch-all parties, because they focus on short-term tactics without clear ideology, promote mainstream and often incoherent policies (Feșnic 2011, 51). Cartel parties get their name from their clientalistic networks:

> “The continuous struggle between political elites for access to state resources and the emphasis placed on personalities, including the war between the two palaces, rather than on the policy orientation of the party as a whole, point in the direction of understanding Romanian political parties as cartel parties. Such parties are clearly less effective in governing in the interests of the voters, but highly effective in maintaining their leaders in positions of power and distributing resources.” (Crowther and Suciu 2013, 389)

Romania’s post-communist parties have always been and remain “highly centralized” (King and Marian 2015, 166) and lack intra-party competition. This includes hierarchical structures and very personalized parties, which mostly fail to provide any substantive inner-democratic values. As an example of the still

\(^3\) Preda’s analysis include numbers from 1990 to 2012.
existing importance of party leaders, and based on empirical findings from elections surveys, Gheorghită (2015, 73–74) came to the conclusion that the 2012 elections were heavily based on the personalization of politics – particularly about the question pro/contra Băsescu – showing that policy or programs played a minor role. The consequence were “limited accountability and weakened representation” (Crowther and Suciu 2013, 369–70).

In the post-communist period, Romania was nearly flooded by the number of political parties: 155 parties were registered by September 1992; this number has steadily declined ever since and reached 28 in December 2012 (Preda 2013, 28). Here again, a process of normalization and institutionalization is observable after the initial enthusiasm about the state’s newly acquired democracy. In general, despite more stabilization in the 2000s (Jiglău and Gherghina 2011, 72), party and party system institutionalization has been incomplete, making clientelism and state capture, with particular regard to the relocation of funds, crucial factors. According to Protsyk and Matichescu (2011), clientelism and political recruitment, with a strong interdependence of parties and financial elites, has even increased. This has only added to the volatility of the system and the incoherent ideological programs of both parties and voters (Volintiru 2012, 134–43). Party organisation (decentralization of candidate selection and re-nomination of MPs) can effect electoral volatility (Gherghina 2014, 155–62).

Jiglău and Gherghina (2011, 83) have looked into ideological institutionalization between 1990 and 2008 and their findings suggest that this has not taken place yet. Although public opinion surveys (2000–2004) show ideological consistency among the electorate, these “opportunistic reorientations” across ideologies resulted in very limited electoral costs for the parties, as Pop-Elecheș (2008, 477) noted. Politics, political discourse and voting is not based on ideology in Romania (Tufiş 2009, 15). This pattern can be observed up until the present, particularly for those who are not voting or base their vote on non-ideological patterns, leading Comșa (2009, 4–9) to remark that ideological voting is “between absence and (in)consistency”. The majority of parties are centre-right and liberal and/or conservative – at least according to their official programme. The only main party on the centre-left is the PSD, which has not much to do with actual leftist, social-democratic politics. More parties to the right and left ends of the political spectrum, including radical or even extremist parties, can be found, but constitute an often-negligible aspect, as they do not enter parliament. Also missing are right-wing populist parties, which have recently become successful in Europe and beyond. This is mostly due to the already existing parties behaving as populist and thus not leaving much room in the political arena for the entry of new, similarly oriented parties. Minority parties are also of importance regarding parliament, as they are guaranteed seats in parliament, even if they are unable to meet the 5% threshold.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, six parties managed to get above the 5% threshold and we will thus further discuss them: Social Democrats, National Liberals, Hungarian Party, the Liberal-Democratic Alliance and the People’s Movement. The Union to Save Romania will be presented in more detail later (Chapter
Many other smaller parties, including ethnic minority parties, are part of the political system but play a smaller role in today’s politics. As it will become clear, party-switching, party fusions or fragmentation and forming (election) alliances have also become a widespread phenomenon. To exemplify briefly: During 2011–2014 the PSD under Ponta formed the Social Liberal Union (USL) alliance for parliamentary elections with the PNL and the Conservative Party (PC) in order to end the Băsescu dominance. This union is a good example of alliances across ideologies, only to seek power – or to end the power of the incumbent. Not long after their mutual alliance, the PSD and the PNL (as part of the Christian Liberal Alliance between PDL and PNL) became major opponents in the 2014 presidential elections.

First and of foremost importance for Romania’s party system is today’s Partidul Social Democrat (PSD) – the Social Democratic Party. Its origins are to be found in the revolution of 1989 – the former platform National Salvation Front (FSN) turned into a party in 1990. After a split within the FSN, the leader and president Ion Iliescu led the new party Democratic Front of National Salvation (FDSN), which was renamed to Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR). From now on, they were known as the Social Democrats, although they did not have much in common with historic Social Democratic Parties in Europe. In 2001, during the second full-time presidency of Iliescu, the PSD came officially into being. For the first time in post-communist Romania, PSD lost the highest share of votes in parliamentary elections in 2008 (Ștefan and Grecu 2014, 196–97). However, whoever thought that this would mark a period of decline for PSD underestimated the party’s power – they regained a majority in both 2012 and 2016 (in coalition with ALDE). Iliescu in the early phase and Victor Ponta more recently were important characters for the PSD. Currently, Liviu Dragnea leads the party. While on paper the PSD is a centre-left party, pragmatism and power keeping have always been above ideological premises.

The second important post-revolution party is Partidul Democrat Liberal (PDL) – the Liberal Democratic Party. The PDL is the successor of the Democratic Party (PD), which in turn was the second party coming out of the FSN-split in 1992. It was the main opposition force early on and then again in the early 2000s when the PSD governed. PDL had its most important phase in the 2000s, when the party leader and former Bucharest major Traian Băsescu became president twice in 2004 and 2008. The PDL merged with PNL in 2014, after it had formed an alliance already before.

Băsescu, after he left PDL in 2013, made his own party Mișcarea Populară (MP) – the Popular Movement – in 2014, which fused with the Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României (UNPR) in 2016. This centre-right, self-declared popular-liberal party is a good example of how politics is still based on an individual’s characteristics, rather than on program or policy.

The Partidul Național Liberal (PNL) – National Liberal Party – retains historic origins, as it existed before the Second World War. While always present in Romanian politics, the PNL grew in importance under leader
1 Transformation Legacies

Crin Antonescu through an opposition alliance with PSD in 2011. The alliance dissolved in 2014, when PSD-leader Ponta did not want Iohannis to become their common nomination for the upcoming presidential elections. As a result, the PNL formed the Christian-Liberal Alliance (ACL) with PDL, which eventually brought the PNL-leader Klaus Iohannis to the party’s first presidency. Due to legal obligations of official party resignation for presidents, Ludovic Orban – after lengthy issues – has been heading PNL since June 2017. They are considered centre-right-liberal and are part of the European People’s Party (EPP).

A very new fusion of parties represents the Partidul Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților (ALDE), or Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, which was founded in 2015 as a merger between Partidului Liberal Reformator (PLR) and Partidul Conservator (PC). It represents a liberal centre-right policy and is part of the European ALDE. The current leader is Călin Popescu-Târiceanu – a good example of party switching and personalization; He became PM with PNL in 2004, turned against Băsescu in accordance with PSD in 2007, left PNL in 2014 and created PLR, ran as independent presidential candidate in 2014 and eventually became part of the coalition in 2016.

The most important ethnic party is the Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România (UDMR) – the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania. Their relevance stems not only from the fact that they represent Romania’s biggest ethnic minority, but also because the party was part of government coalitions several times. The current leader is Hunor Kelemen. The Greater Romania Party (PRM) – Partidul România Mare – is also worth mentioning, as it was a key party under leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor due to its radical, right-wing and neo-chauvinistic ideology during the 1990s. However, it has not been elected into Parliament since 2004.4

This part has shown that both current political system, which has undergone some reforms, and the origin and power of the political parties, foremost the strongest one PSD, trace back to the transformation period. Today’s elections and party system seem to fit Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) cleavage theory; In Romania it is mainly PSD against non-PSD. Twenty-seven years have passed and over this time, other truly post-communist actors have had the chance to alter the system and the way it functions. This is not only regarding the FSN-PSD, but also the opposition parties, which, when in power, failed to break with the past in order to present a real alternative. While the framework has at least partially improved, the political nature of the state has stayed the same – or perhaps become more fine-tuned in terms of clientelism and corruption. The next chapter shows how this happened and how the transformation unfolded in Romania.

1.2 The Problematic Democratisation Process

Romania’s contemporary history has seen the official independence from Ottomans in 1878, monarchy and nation-building processes in the interwar period, fascist dictatorship during World War Two, and communist dictatorship in the second half of the 20th century. While these are to be kept in mind for some issues, this chapter focuses on the democratisation process, beginning with 1989. This process has seen successful top-down reform periods, but also backlashes to authoritarian practices. Romania’s democratization involved regime change – from an authoritarian to a democratic system. Questions remain as to whether this democratisation has led to consolidated democracy or remained a partial one. The once positively acknowledged radical change became “one of the most problematic democratization processes in the region” (Ștefan and Grecu 2014, 196). The quality of democracy depends, on one hand, on the political system, ruling elite and existing structures, and on the other hand, its citizens as crucial factors towards improving quality and effectiveness of democracy (Haerpfer 2011, 622–27). In short, although top-down democratization has happened, the process has remained a problematic one.

This part features three key aspects of Romania’s post-communist history: First, it is important to understand which effects the much-discussed revolution have had. Second, the idea of “returning to Europe” and Romania’s re-integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures is presented, including their power to demand continuous reforms. Third, how Romania has seemed to be on track after its EU membership in 2007, but has since seen a variety of setbacks.

1.2.1 The Initial Transformation – Or the Lack Thereof

Transformation from a harsh communist dictatorship to a liberal democracy includes political, economic and social processes (Phinnemore and Light 2001, 1–2), and is by nature already a very complicated transformation that requires endurance and vision. In the case of Romania, this transformation was carried out top-down by the formerly ruling communist elite, further engaging in authoritarian practices and “only formal democratic procedures” (King and Marian 2015, 150). Even in the early post-revolution phase, people noted the lack of basic democratic understanding among the government (Verdery 2015, 17–20). What they observed was a formerly communist nomenclature taking power: Ion Iliescu, an emerging revolutionary leader, became head of the country. First, he was the leader of the key platform National Salvation Front (NSF) during the revolution. The NSF then turned into a party in 1990 and Iliescu became the first president after a process that hardly qualifies as a democratic election. A weak opposition, a non-existent civil society, and a power-holding party, mostly consisting of people formerly active during the

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5 For instance radical nationalism in early 1990s due to a lengthy nation-building process (Gallagher 2001, 104).
6 Including theories about being either a stolen, a spontaneous or a false revolution – the interpretation depending on the (political) perspective (Siani-Davies 2001, 22).
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communist dictatorship all in combination with nationalistic, anti-minority rhetoric, shaped the period of “lost opportunities” from 1990–1996 (Deletant 2001, 56). State institutions, such as the security system or the state owned mainstream media, stayed under the influence of Iliescu and helped him win the first multi-party elections in 1992.

The first “peaceful and democrat  istic alternation of power” (Phinnemore and Light 2001, 4) in the history of Romania occurred in 1996 due to slow liberalisation and external demands. The “return to Europe” via EU and NATO applications was so popular to the public that it restricted the nationalistic extreme parties, ultimately leading to further democratization after the regime change in 1996 (Gallagher 2001, 108). These next four years under president Constantinescu, characterized by internal political will and international pressure, meant long-awaited reforms. At the same time, Romania experienced tense economic difficulties at the end of the decade due to structural problems, geographical reasons (no direct EU-member state border), and a lack of foreign direct investment (Smith 2001, 127; 146). These economic turbulences also resulted from a slow and incomplete privatization process – in successful areas corruption and clientelism dominated privatization during the early 1990s, resulting in a “baron”-elite. This developing oligarchy was at the same time funding the new post-communist political elite (Deletant 2015, 221–22). This was a circle of profit for a few, which had a lasting effect on regional development and infrastructure, and led to widespread poverty during the 1990s.

In 2000, the PDSR returned to power and Năstase became prime minister. Under his four-year regime, an "informal privatization process" took place, paving the way for "spectacular personal fortunes" along party associates and PDSR benefits in all sectors (Gallagher 2015, 174). In comparison to other post-communist countries, Romania had already taken the role as “laggard” at that time (Phinnemore 2001, 250).

1.2.2 The “Return to Europe”

The “return to Europe” was already in the 10-point-programme from the NSF in 1989 (Phinnemore 2001, 246). For Romania, returning to Europe was the most important post-communist project. Even the semi-authoritarian leaders engaged with this process, at least superficially, due to its great popularity among the electorate. Romania’s elite, according to Pridham (2007, 535), displayed three characteristics in their engagement: First, a general positive mood towards Europe (primarily rhetorically without demonstrating an understanding of integration’s actual entailments); second, an attempt to please the “West” and gain their approval; and third, high hopes for potential benefits associated with European membership.

Phinnemore (2001, 250–64) identifies several aspects of the “return to Europe” process: During the first two years, everything remained as mere rhetoric. The period between 1992–1996 showed rapprochement on both sides, mostly due to external factors (dissolution of Yugoslavia), which made Romania important to regional stability, leading to its membership with the Council of Europe in 1993, the Partnership for Peace
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with NATO in 1994, and an application for EU membership in 1995. Between 1996 and 1997, further reforms took place, but not enough, especially in regards to economic development. The improvements, particularly in the field of minority and women’s rights, were acknowledged, yet a trending pattern in Romania’s reforms was highlighted: There was a discrepancy between the legal framework of such reforms and their effectiveness when applied. Despite this partial progress, it became clear that no real immediate membership prospect was on the table, due to both the discrepancies as well as Iliescu’s authoritarian practices, such as bringing miners from Jiu valley to Bucharest in order to pressure and threaten the opposition (Phinnemore and Light 2001, 2–3). This ultimately led to frustration for both Romanians and international organisations who sought Romania’s development. Deletant (2015, 220–21) noted that Romania was an inhibited reformer, as the ruling elite around Iliescu and his ex-communist apparatchiks were hesitant. As such, the pressure of international organisations became the “major catalysts of reform”. Both NATO (2004) and EU (2007) membership were more the result of the reforms made during 1996–1999 rather than those made during the resurgence of president Iliescu in 2000–2004.

In this period of approaching EU membership, another barony established itself – this time a political one practicing clientelism and patronage by distributing available EU funds in the districts (județe) among personal networks. During this time, the parties – foremost the PSD – managed to create a lasting foothold in the countryside by establishing a local political-economic barony (Gallagher 2009, 173–74), which is the basis for continuous local support even through today (Brett 2016). Pop, Doroștei, and Dimulescu (2013, 101–6) find that this trend has continued and is primarily carried out by the parties in power – regardless of the actual party. The OUG 55/2014 (later declared unconstitutional and reversed in 2015) – which allowed local politicians to switch parties – further demonstrates the insignificance of policy parties (Lazăr 2015). Significance is rather found in power and financial benefits, or the parties ability to best benefit the politician (Expert Forum 2016). In the 2007–2013 period, Romania was among the highest potential recipients of EU funds, but had by far the lowest absorption rate (around a staggering 12%). The “combination of the lack of administrative capacity, mismanagement and corruption” as well as an absence of control mechanisms led to the suspension of EU payments (Pop, Doroștei, and Dimulescu 2013, 102–3).

In 2004, the former Bucharest mayor (and technocrat during communism) Traian Băsescu – a pragmatic with truly populist attitude — won the presidential run-off (Stan and Vancea 2015a, 202–3). There were two key characteristics to his presidency; In 2006 he initiated the first real attempt to counter “post-communist forgetfulness”, which was mostly carried out by Năstase (Stan and Tismăneanu 2015, 26). Second, he appointed Monica Macovei in 2004. Macovei set the rule of law on course with EU membership

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7 For minority rights, mostly concerning Hungarians and Roma, see for instance Salat and Novák (2015); for women rights and feminism, and the representative decline after EU membership see e.g. Miroiu (2015).
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requirements. This ended the immunity of influential persons and gave way to investigations that led to the conviction of former PSD-leader and president Năstase (Gallagher 2015, 175).

Without question, the EU-accession on January 1st 2007 was a key event in Romania’s post-communist history. A rugged process came to an end — at least formally. Romania’s inefficiency, lack of democratisation, and particularly negative image hampered accession process several times in the 1990s. In 2004, when the first central and south eastern European countries were accepted, Romania received a “to-do-list” and a “safeguard clause” – highlighting the difficulties in the reform and conditionality process (Pridham 2007, 531–33). The two major issues – corruption and rule of law – led the EU to its first-ever post-accession mechanism to further evaluate and supervise Romania’s progress even beyond membership. The progress on judicial reforms during the EU-conditionality term and in post-accession was analysed by Mendelski (2012, 36–37), who concluded that while the top-down EU reform process had formal, institutional success, effective and applied rule of law has been undermined by domestic veto players – which had actually downgraded Romania’s justice system since 2007. The post-accession conditionality – the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism focusing on corruption and rule of law for both Romania and Bulgaria – lacked effectiveness, as punishments were limited and the motivating incentive of EU-accession had already been reached (Gateva 2013, 436). The latest report (European Commission 2017) clearly states that the four benchmarks set out in 2007 have yet to be accomplished. While the report highlights an overall positive trend, the upcoming annual report is likely to provide further criticisms.

1.2.3 The post-EU misery

These recurring setbacks, high expectations, and political instability due to party conflicts have led to a disappointed and discouraged electorate. Corruption, personal interest, poor-decision making and inefficient bureaucracy has dominated Romania’s political system. Ministries even tend “to be treated as personal fiefdoms” (Deletant 2015, 224).

The division of parliamentary and presidential elections, and the resulting power struggle between president and government, began in 2007. Divisions became more visible and restricting after 2009. The first major event took place soon after EU membership was achieved; Mircea Geana, the new PSD leader, was a leading figure in the first referendum against Băsescu – together with media mogul and politician Dan Voiculescu. Băsescu’s biggest political issue was the appointment of Calin Popescu Tăriceanu (PNL leader at that time) as prime minister – a staunch critic of his reforms (Gallagher 2015, 174–76). Although Băsescu was the first president to be suspended (and thus far, the only one), a referendum in May 2007 regained him his power.
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Ciobanu (2015, 269) summarized the post-2007 period as one of “vigorous reforms of the justice system and the pursuit of corrupt officials.” Meanwhile, further “social and political polarization, factionalism, populism, and serious attempts to reverse the process of democratization” had emerged, all further intensified by the harsh economic crisis and austerity measures. Two examples thus exemplify the developments of the last decade. First, Romania has established an effective anti-corruption agency (DNA), especially after Kovesi took over in 2013. The list of convicted persons include former prime minister (Năstase), ministers, and financial/media barons (Deletant 2015, 230–33). Second, the political elite across all parties, but in particular the Social Democratic Party (PSD), continuously try to undermine these anti-corruption measures and to bypass democratic practices. The 2012 political and constitutional crisis is the best example; Under the political leadership of prime minister Ponta (PSD) and with a media campaign led by Voiculescu, the Social-Liberal Union (UCL) alliance began an impeachment process against president Băsescu, undermining central democratic institutions such as the Constitutional Court or the ombudsman (Ciobanu 2015, 267). Due to pressure from EU and U.S., the change of the referendum law was denied and the referendum with only 46% turnout was declared invalid (Deletant 2015, 226).

Ponta’s grab for power, and his arrogance after winning parliamentary elections with a majority, was first hindered by the 2014 presidential elections. The win by Klaus Iohannis from the Christian-Liberal Alliance (ACL) in the run-off – after diaspora voting irregularities led to protests – was a new beginning for many Romanians. Iohannis’ campaign message, "we are taking back our country" (Cinpoeş 2015, 109) remained merely a promise. While there have been a variety of possibilities to cut-off the old ties, the legacies of the transformation are still visible in the political, social, and economic spheres.

1.3 Political Culture

Since early post-communist days, there has been a violent public discourse that has recently grown louder. The following chapter will outline Romania’s fragmented and polarized political culture – one that lacks substantial political debate. This is important as it influences confidence in political institutions and voter turnout, the decline of both came alongside this increasing intolerant and violent political discourse (Cinpoeş 2015, 122).

In the concept of political culture, in the tradition of Almond and Verba (1963), the role of the individual is important, as well as towards other political actors and institutions within society. The individual shapes

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8 A telling example about oligarchy, corruption, DNA-success and the commingling of business with politics: Voiculescu was a Senator in Bucharest between 2004 and 2013, founder of the Humanist Party and later active in the Conservative Party (PC). With his company Intact Media Group he is among the richest in Romania. After many years of investigation by the DNA and parliamentary immunity, in 2013 he was sentenced to five years in prison for money laundering, which was extended to ten years after his appeal. In July 2017 he was released early. For more information cf. Dosarul "I.C.A." n.d. and Olteanu (2017a).
the community objectives, actions, and behaviours; He or she gives “meaning to the political sphere” and determines “what is politics and what is not” (Cartocci 2011, 1967–1968).

Mungiu-Pippidi (2007) argues that from a historical perspective, a “hijacked modernization” has determined political culture in Romania – particularly due to foreign influence, economic development, and an absence of modernization among political elites until the end of the 20th century. However, according to Cinpoesş (2015, 108), today’s Romania’s political culture has three key features: (1) “a fragmented nature of party politics”, (2) “polarization of opinion that underpins deep social divisions” and (3) “high level of violence and intolerance present in public discourse”. The following pages shall provider a closer look at what this means for the country.

The first feature refers to the general political instability and high polarization of party politics in Romania, which has been outlined in the first chapter. It includes continuous fragmentation and fusions of parties as well as party switching of politicians – making party ideologies and programs irrelevant and present the parties as all the same. In addition, there is a high polarization of the political scenery in general. This cleavage was visible for instance during the Băsescu – anti-Băsescu debates and is currently tangible between PSD and anti-PSD supporters.

The second feature highlights the impact of media in the political discourse and opinion shaping, with all main parties having their own channels – or at least their support. This leaves little space for critical and independent discourse and thus strengthening the already existing divisions. Media has “transformed politics into a public show […] which in turn has turned voters into mere spectators, rather than actively engaged citizens” Cinpoesş (2015, 108). The assessment of Romania’s media by Gross (2015, 131–32) leaves little doubt about the nature of the media landscape, which has hardly changed; It is unprofessional, partisan, controlled, and manipulating – with few qualified exceptions that are primarily emerging and growing in popularity through online-based media outlets or social media. Traditional media involves clientelism, instrumentalization and aligning with politics. This phenomenon can particularly be observed in television: Uncritical journalism and politics merge into “a spectacle of polarization” and radicalization of discourse based on aggression and intolerance – leading media to be used as a weapon by political parties and interest groups (Cinpoesş 2015, 119–20).

The Freedom House (2002–2017) report on press freedom has always referred to Romania as “partly free. While countries such as Poland and Hungary observed recent setbacks, Romania seems to be rather stable,9 indicating that the early intermingling of traditional media and politics had already started during the transformation process and continues until today. This entanglement is best described with the following

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9 Romania’s scores are in the 30s and 40s, in a Scala from 0 (most free) to 100 (least free).
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quote: “[A]long with the society, the media and its sister institutions are products of the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the political-economic and media elites who lead, control, manipulate, and influence these outlets” (Gross 2015, 142). Stănus (2012, 280) notes that in Romania, trust in media is connected with whether a person is in favor of party, has confidence in institutions, or satisfaction with politics.

In the meantime, there has been an increase of independent journalists with integrity as well as an increase of online media outlets such as HotNews, Casa Jurnalistului or the investigative Rise project.

The third feature points primarily towards Romania’s violence in politics, not physical, but verbal violence. This is observable since the transformation and always increased with debates on issues with a higher stake, such as presidential elections or important government decisions. The intense violence in public discourse, most notably in political debates and in media, "seems to be a trademark of Romanian politics" (Cinpoes 2015, 111–12), undermining legitimacy and a possibility of rational and necessary public discourse. However, it also refers to high levels of intolerance and discrimination in general, which can currently be observed on two examples:

(1) The initiative “Coalitia pentru Familie” (Coalition for Family). In 2016, they collected three million signatures with the attempt to change the Constitution article 48 to determine that a family can only exist between a man and a woman (Ion 2016). This initiative, supported by the New Right and Orthodox Church, needed parliamentary approval and an initial referendum vote – a clear signs of backlash on liberal democratic values. In June 2017 a counter-platform, RESPECT, was initiated by a wide variety of NGOs and individuals (Ro Insider 2017). Should the initiative pass parliament, a high polarization of public discourse will follow – a welcomed distraction for the government from more pressing social and economic issues.

(2) The situation of ethnic minorities. While the Hungarian minority has been at the focus of polarization and discrimination during the 1990s, the Roma minority poses, without question, one of the biggest challenges Romania faces in the near and long-term future. This is a matter of housing, discrimination, ethnic segregation, and overall prevalent inequalities (Ciobanu 2017). Official census data reports around 620.000 Roma in Romania; unofficial estimations are at approximately 1,8 Million (Council of Europe 2012) . These discrepancies are relevant to voting registration and representation. In addition, a survey in 2013 shows that 48% do not want a Romani working colleague, 41% a Romani neighbour and 38% a Romani in their municipality (European Roma Rights Centre 2016). This widespread negative image of Roma in Romanian public discourse hampers equality and inflames anti-Roma discourse and discrimination.

This chapter on political culture has shown the effects of polarization, intolerance and verbal violence, political fragmentation and opinion shaping by media on the Romanian state. Some of these factors are a direct result from the transformation period. In combination with continuous dissatisfaction with politicians
and their institutions, these factors have led to an essential lack of confidence in politics, their actors and institutions, essentially undermining the democratic process and affecting political participation.

1.4 Socio-Economic Aspects

Inequalities, “grew tremendously after 1990 and today, Romania is among the most unequal countries in the EU” (Precupețu 2013, 249). Inequality is one of the key issues Romania faces – the country’s socio-economic situation is among the worst in the European Union. According to Țâra (2013, 131), they exist on political (participation), social (status), and material (economic) levels. This chapter thus focuses on material or economic indicators of inequality with particular attention to income, occupation, and education. These inequalities matter, because many live in poverty and “their main concern is survival, not politics or community participation” (Crăciun 2017a, 3). Solt (2008, 48) imposingly showed that economic inequality “powerfully depresses political interest, discussion of politics, and participation in elections among all but the most affluent and that this negative effect increases with declining relative income.”

Since many years, Romania faces a difficult economic situation. The “at-risk-of-poverty rate” by Eurostat (2017) shows that one out of four is viewed as being at-risk-of-poverty (25.4%) – the highest rate in the EU. The long-term development points to improvement; The percentage of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion dropped from 47% (2007) to 38.8% in 2016 (Eurostat 2007–2016). Exceedingly affected are vulnerable children, youth and in particular Roma, which face higher inequalities across all sectors (Precupețu 2013, 251–52). While these statistics remain considerably high, the number of people affected by absolute poverty – after having increased radically from 1990 (5.7%) to 2000 (35.9%) during the early transformation – decreased to 5.2% in 2010 (Precupetu 2013, 258).

When looking at inequality of income distribution, Romania is once again among the worst in the European Union. Eurostat (2016) Eurostat statistics on *Inequality of income distribution* display a 7.2 ratio, meaning that the top 20% earners receive 7.2 times the income of the bottom 20% in Romania. The longitudinal analysis reveals that this has improved by a full point since 2015 (8.3), but also that it has increased overall – in 2000 Romania’s ratio was only 4.5 (Eurostat 2000–2016). It should also be noted that income statistics are only revealing inequality to a certain extent, as wealth can also be bequeathed or accumulated via non-official or illegal means.

Romania’s employment rate has been considerably consistent. Although it has recently slightly improved (63.6% in 2005 and 66.6% in 2016), it remains among the lowest in the European Union (Eurostat 2005–2016). Another indicator of the socio-economic status of Romania is the minimum wage, which has been raised to around 318€ (1450 Lei) in 2017 (Ministerul Muncii și Justiției Sociale 2017), an increase of almost 200€ since EU membership in 2007 (Eurostat 2007–2017). These indicators are even more significant once urban and rural areas are separated. The average income in the countryside is only half of the income of
people living in cities (Crowther and Suciu 2013, 376). Țăra (2013, 134) names the (growing) young, well-educated, and mostly urban population as the transformation winners, while people with low levels of education, without stable working places, and residents of marginalized communities – particularly in rural areas – are those generally left behind and at risk of poverty. Precupețu (2013) notes that the urban-rural disparity in equality becomes visible in all sectors: employment, education, and income.

A mix of lack of professional opportunities (low wages, lack of career promotion, lack of technology/funding) and a surplus of a skilled work force with a limited labour market has led to high emigration levels in Romania, in particular after 2007 – further fuelled by easier movement within the European Union (Petroff 2016, 123). To put it in numbers, between 2007 (21.130.503) and 2017, (19.638.309) approximately 1.5 Million people have left the country – around 7% of the population. These exceptional numbers were higher before 1990, when Romania had a population upwards of 23M. The last time Romania had the level of 2017 (19.7M) was in 1968 (Eurostat 1960–2017). The issues arising with this emigration are omnipresent: There is a declining and ageing population, a deficit in labour force and taxpayers, and severe lack of experts in fields such as health care and research (Goga and Ilie 2017, 96). These factors turn emigration into a pivotal factor for Romania’s socio-economic status, as not only are qualified workforce leaving Romania, but as are well-educated and critical elite along middle-class citizens. Due to a “lack of democratic development in Romania (high levels of corruption, lack of welfare state, etc.), the return of the emigrated seems unlikely in the mid-term future” (Petroff 2016, 132). At the same time, it is observable that some of the emigrants during communism or early post-communism have returned by now, bringing back liberal and democratic values.

Inequalities in education are particularly crucial, as they tend to reinforce other inequalities while being reinforced by, inter alia, income or social inequalities. The study by Precupețu (2013, 253–73) demonstrates the severity of such inequalities for Roma (the study shows 20% of Roma children not even enrolled in school) and children coming from vulnerable backgrounds (disadvantaged families, HIV infected or with special needs). The same study points to Romania’s high proportion of early school leavers – 17.5% in 2011, which further strengthens this cycle of inequality.

Crăciun (2017a, 3) sees these indicators as crucial regarding political participation, as the “main concern is survival, not politics or community participation”. At the same time, public opinion surveys show that people consider the state as the key influential factor regarding personal economic well-being (56.6% in 2002), and 90% (1994–2007) think that the state should provide jobs and greater responsibility for welfare (Cernat 2010, 44). In 2012, in the World Values Survey (1998–2012) a majority of 55% (answers 6–10)
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considers the government responsible for their well-being. This reflects the widespread opinion of powerlessness to bring change by individual engagement or empowerment.

These numbers reveal that politics is considered a crucial factor in people’s daily lives, albeit not be the most important one compared to socio-economic difficulties. The reasons for such inequalities in Romania’s society can be found in communist legacies, in the transformation process, and in the lack of government programs and reforms. Salaries are rather low, employment is low, poverty is widespread, there is a crucial rural-urban division in society. Healthcare is in a devastating condition and the educational system needs reform and modernisation. This chapter has shown that the socio-economic status can lead to greater dissatisfaction with government and parties and eventually to a withdrawal of traditional participation forms.

1.5 Conclusion

To recap briefly, a problematic democratisation process, authoritarian practices, weak opposition, and economic struggles have marked Romania’s post-communist transformation period. The political system (mixed-parliament-presidential system) and main parties have also been developed in this period. Parliament and parties are characterized by centralisation, informal practices, party switching and fragmentation. Key parties, foremost the PSD, are a direct result of the 1990s. Although new parties and new actors have entered the political scene since, none managed to break with the old habits of clientelism and corruption. Strict hierarchies, personalization and no or very little inner-democratic values have further disengaged citizens. Ideologies or party programs play a subordinate role in Romania, as the main parties are considered to be catch-all and cartel parties.

The rugged privatisation process has led to a variety of inequalities and poverty, creating a circle of profit for a few (which in turn supported the parties) – many of whom are from the old communist nomenclature. The EU-accession process during the 2000s led to some reforms, particularly regarding rule of law and anti-corruption measures (e.g. DNA). Yet they were carried out top-down, without sincere interest on further democratising the state. This high discrepancy between reforms and their applications is in turn reflected by the EU’s first post-membership mechanism. Political instability has marked the aftermath of EU-accession, along with an economic crisis and harsh austerity measures.

Many of today’s issues and processes have noticeably deep roots in the communist past and the early post-communist period, namely authoritarian socialisation and socio-economic status. The impact is not only visible when looking at the transformation of the political system, but also at the political culture, the violent political discourse, the lack of good governance (corruption - clientelism - lack of transparency), and

10 On a Scala from 10 (government should take more responsibility) to 1 (people should take more responsibility). “No answer” and “Don’t know” 2%. (N) = 1503.
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a rich economic-political elite accompanied with high inequality and poverty levels. This is especially hard for those beyond the emerging middle-class: the rural population, vulnerable groups (children mostly) lacking education, or marginalized communities such as the Roma.

These lasting legacies, a post-communist political elite unwilling to address socio-economic and political issues, paired with a lack of checks and balances (i.a. independent media, civil society etc.) have resulted in the current dysfunctions (Stoiciu 2016, 63). All these factors outlined above have led to a lack of confidence in politics and to low levels of institutional participation. However, it took a new generation of middle-class, well educated and trained citizens – those with the time and interest to engage politics – to become active and raise awareness of the multiple issues at hand. Beginning with 2012, this awareness and critical attitude has spread exponentially. With the help of social media and deep frustration levels across society, this awareness has become a grand mobilization tool. A culture of contentious politics, especially in the form of protests, has emerged.
Local protests, large-scale street demonstrations, and citizens-initiatives have been widely absent throughout the first two decades of post-communist Romania. Yet the 2010s will be remembered as the “awakening” of Romania’s civil society. As implied by the introductory quotation, elected political representatives must take an interest in the needs and demands of their citizens, yet chapter one has shown such an understanding of politics is yet to occur in Romania. A new generation of active, interested, and critical citizens is necessary to protest against such inadequate political behaviour in general and particular policies when needed.

Anti-democratic setbacks and subsequent protests have occurred throughout the former communist parts of eastern and south-eastern Europe. Đžihić and Hayoz (2016, 7–8) have identified civil society and social protests as elemental pillars in fighting such setbacks. Marchenko (2016) identifies decision- and policy making by current political elites as primary reasons for civic activism in the region. This rings true in Romania, where civil society has grown increasingly active (and effective) in response to a variety of issues such as authoritarian characteristics, austerity measures, corruption, or environmental and healthcare related problems.

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis sees protests, social movements, civic activism etc. as means of non-institutional political participation. Therefore, it is important to determine where and how these protest movements have begun. How have they unfolded? How are they connected? Who are the driving forces behind the campaigns? Most importantly, what have been the results and observable consequences? In order to answer these questions, Tilly and Tarrow’s (2015) contentious politics analysis will be applied in this chapter.

2.1 Contentious Politics Analysis

The so-called “dynamic-turn” is fundamental for the study of causal mechanisms in social movement and protest research. Dynamic-turn focuses on cross-influence of processes and mechanism rather than static conditions (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). This research string resulted in Tilly and Tarrow’s (2015) key work “Contentious Politics”, which also helps determine the interplay between movements, states, and political parties.

Contentious politics is about contention, collective action, and politics – actors making claims on other actors’ interests, which result in combined efforts and joint programs in which the government, often as
target, is involved (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 7; 10). In Romania, the matters of contention were mostly
corruption or attempted law changes. The counterpart was changing but always involved the governing
elite— the political class. Protesters primarily opposed the “establishment”, highlighting their own
nonpartisan nature. Performances varied, but demonstrations and marches were the most impactful.

Within this approach, contentious episodes are deconstructed into causal mechanisms and processes.
Following the definition of Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 28–39), mechanisms “alter relations among specified
sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations” and processes are
“sequences of mechanisms that produce similar (generally more complex and contingent) transformations
of those elements”. Performances, repertoires and campaigns constitute a large part of contentious
politics: Performances are necessary to make collective claims; Repertoires define the set of actions that
movements resort to. A “contentious campaign” combines the two and focuses on a particular policy (Tilly
and Tarrow 2015, 14–15). The authors (2015, 115) have also identified three particular elements crucial for
the study of contentious episodes in order to deconstruct them: (1) the description of the context, the
initial conditions; (2) the identification of contentious action; (3) the outcomes. The first chapter of this
thesis has provided some of the necessary context, while the following parts of the second chapter further
elaborate on the initial conditions at the beginning of the protests, the contentious episodes, and the early
political outcomes.

The causal mechanisms and processes link contention and protests to political outcomes, leading to both
direct and indirect results while highlighting shortcomings of the protests. Bosi, Giugni, and Uba (2016, 11–
25) identified four potential outcomes. Among these interrelated consequences (policy, cultural,
institutional and biographical), the study of the political consequences of movements investigates changes
in policy, political agenda, and political institutions or regimes (Giugni, Bosi, and Uba 2013). Thus, political
consequences are directly related to the state, but also to society at large (Kolb 2007, 4).

While it may be worth investigating the consequences of protests with cultural and biographical
dimensions, it is beyond the scope here. Rather, this thesis focuses on the impact of protests on a political
level – in regards to policies and institutions. Whereas consequences of social movements are best studied
in the long-term, this paper looks towards the initial and direct impact it has had on political change.
Therefore, the outcomes presented are subject to change in the long run.

Amenta et al. (2010) evaluated scholarly production on political consequences. They argued that a wide
variety of aspects, even those beyond the usual factors of mobilization, strategies, context, and political
mediation, can alter outcomes (2010, 300–301). These factors can be both within the movement and
outside of it. While studies show tendencies towards the impacts of particular factors, such as political
mediation for political change, far-reaching and comprehensive comparative studies have yet to be carried
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out. Additionally, it is not always easy to determine to which extent a social movement or contentious episode has actually contributed to political change, nor the factors behind them.

Social movement studies vary (cf. Klandermans and van Stekelenburg 2013; Rucht 2014) and are part of contentious episodes, but will play a subordinate role in this analysis, as there is not one movement leading contentious actions in Romania. Rather individuals, groups of protesters, and informal networks play this role. A group gathered around anti-mining exploitation in Roşia Montană, which has been active for over a decade now and became relevant in 2013, is maintains a clear policy agenda and institutionalisation. The following parts will demonstrate that contention in Romania has been mostly re-active and only slowly becomes pro-actively engaged in politics.

2.2 The Development of Civil Society in Romania after 1989

Civil society was conceived to be weak and inactive during the 1990s across eastern and central Europe. This conception of a weak civil society was first questioned by Kopecký and Mudde (2003), who argue that it stems from overly high expectations and a narrow definition of civil society that focuses only on pro-democratic movements (Kopecký 2003, 2). Although Mudde (2003, 164) emphasizes including “uncivil” movements in the study of civil society, this chapter only looks at so-called “pro-democratic” organisations. Examples of civil society with undemocratic agendas are, for instance, right-wing or nationalistic movements (Goll 2015).

In the early 1990s, Romania’s rather weak pro-democratic civil society was partially due to harsh restriction during communism and a strong state in post-communism, the absence of a truly civil revolutionary movement as in other former communist countries, and general mistrust in organizations by citizens (Parau 2008, 119–21). The deficit of non-institutionalised civic and political participation grew to be significant during the 1990s. Romania had experienced very few and small protests – also a result of authoritarian suppression by the government, with the help of the miners from Jiu Valley, in the 1990s (Olteanu 2017b, 11).11 What Robertson (2009, 190–208) argues regarding Romania’s youth can be applied to society in general; a perception of powerlessness and indifference against the state.

Thus, political influence of civil society organisations remained limited and may give further insight upon in-depth research. Examples of early NGOs with influence are, for instance, the Association of Former Political Prisoners, Civic Alliance, and Pro Democracy (Lambru 2017, 161). A good example of civic activism was the ten-point platform established by the Coalition for Good Governance and Partnership with Associations. This platform focused on combining good governance and its discourse with the political scenery – yet the political opted out of such dialogue (Lambru 2017, 161).

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11 A short overview on main protest episodes between 1977 and early 90s can be found at Burean and Badescu (2013, 7–8).
Following the argument of Lambru (2017; Lambru and Vameșu 2010), who has studied civil society and NGOs extensively in Romania, there were three phases for CSOs in early post-communist Romania: (1) A tumultuous phase after the revolution consisting of “democratic enthusiasm” while NGOs gained importance, but mostly in tensions with the government between 1990 and 1996. (2) With the political change in 1996 came a phase of institutional consolidation, including strong international support and funding, and a mutual partnership development between CS and state. (3) The years between 2000 and 2008 were occupied with EU accession and politicians attempting to meet the *acquis* criteria. The legal framework was immensely improved and the NGO-sector became consolidated.

During the transformation, Romanian NGOs lacked resources in human and financial capital as well organisational capacities. They encountered a generally demoralised public due to disappointments and setbacks (Parau 2008, 121). Activities were mostly in small-scale projects on a local level (Epure, Tiganescu, and Vamesu 2001) and only a few were able to take influence policy.

Parau (2008, 124–36) presents two very interesting examples of successful civil society initiatives in the early 2000s: First against the Dracula theme park in Sighișoara (2001–2002) and the second against the Roșia Montana mining project (2002–2003). As the author retraces these movements protecting environmental and cultural heritage, she identifies the empowerment of Romania’s civil society due to interacting factors:

> "Domestic civil society empowerment stemmed mainly from two causal pathways: pressure from transnational advocacy networks and norm entrepreneurs; and Executive self-constraint in anticipation of accession. The third, sociological pathway – persuasion, social influence, socially constructed identities, and learning – although it did contribute, would probably not have produced the observed changes in Executive behaviour by itself." (Parau 2008, 135)

The consolidation of civil society in Romania has also led to more NGOs, further acceptance, and more trust in civic organisations (Lambru 2017, 158–164). It has proven that, despite a great deficit of civic participation in the transformation period, there is room for optimism – even amongst a slow process and progress (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2013, 64).

In general, the perception of the country’s development has changed immensely. Taking into account that opinion surveys should be considered with cautions, here is a brief outlook of how quickly and opinions changed in Romania. In 2010 a survey said that 78% think the country is heading in a wrong direction (Motoc and Palada 2010). A INSCOP Research (2015) showed that this perception dropped with the election of president Iohannis in December 2014 from around 66–69% to ~31% . Nonetheless, the enthusiasm was short, as within the year it increased once again up to ~48% in September 2015. Another survey during the mass protests in February 2017 showed that „wrong direction“ was once again a widespread opinion with 72% (Avangarde 2017).
To sum up, the 1990s had seen very few protests and those which occurred saw harsh government oppression as a response, demobilizing active citizens. The consolidation of the NGO sector in the 2000s went along with judicial improvement and initial successes. Around 2010, Romania had no protest culture, and only individuals or small groups engaged in contentious action against the government, such as the activist Alexandru Alexe’s attempt at an Occupy Romania movement in December 2011 (HotNews 2011) or the civic activism movement Miliția Spirituală around Mihail Bumbeș, active since the early 2000s (Miliția Spirituală n.d.). Burean and Badescu (2013, 1; 8) provided an overview of other smaller protests, like the Real Democracy Now movement in Cluj, noting that in 2011 these protests were “feeble and brutally repressed by authorities”. In retrospect, 2012 serves as the year where attempts by a few individuals and groups first led to results. Since then, Romanians have slowly become more active.

2.3 President Băsescu bringing the last straw in 2012

The first demonstrations and visible civil society actions occurred in early 2012, when street protests erupted against the authoritarian character of president Băsescu and his proposed privatization of the public health care system. After a live TV intervention by president Băsescu against Raed Arafat (Adevarul 2012), who had become a credible public figure as founder of the Mobile Emergency Service for Resuscitation and Extrication, protests occurred in his home town Târgu Mureș, quickly spreading to other cities in January and February in 2012 (Margarit 2016b). Although these protests had seen a brief violent outbreak (with unclear causes; protesters, hooligans and police were involved), the message was intended to be peaceful.

According to Stoiciu (2016, 58), these manifestations culminated into anti-system protests, as they brought up the difficult economic situation caused by austerity measures that had been introduced by president Băsescu and his PM Boc. Although the measures were already introduced in accordance with international pressure in 2009 and 2010, these did not spark widespread outrage, even though they hurt society’s most vulnerable (Gallagher 2015, 179). The measures included, for instance, salary cuts for state employees, pensions cuts, and increased VAT, primarily impacting low-income families (Crowther and Suciu 2013, 386).

Burean and Badescu (2014, 385–87) noted that these protests were of diverse participants and grievances: Citizens protesting politicians and their parties; elderly protesting pension cuts; others protesting Băsescu’s authoritarian character; environmentalists protesting the Roșia Montana mining project; students protesting the under-financed education system. The protests further became less politicized – politics were rejected as a whole with slogans such as “Toate partidele, aceeași mizerie” – “All parties, the same filth” (Margarit 2016b). Furthermore, in 2012, the potential of networking and mobilisation of social media were significant (Burean and Badescu 2014, 386). Interestingly, and different from other protests or so-

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12 A documentation on the 2012 protests, “București, unde ești?”, was made by Petri (2014) and is online available.
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called revolutions, Facebook is the key platform in Romania, while Twitter plays a subordinate role. At the same time, the protests and usage of (social) media has further polarized the public discourse, leaving less and less room for substantial dialogue or reform – a phenomenon which has only increased recently (Cînpoeș 2015, 121).

Eventually, it led to the first clearly observable political consequence: the resignation of PM Boc in February 2012. However, a smaller group of protesters continued their manifestations in Bucharest for a few months in an attempt to increase the potential of civic activism in Romania. Claudiu Crăciun, declared by the media as one of several informal protest leaders (DIGI24 2017c), became known for advocating this non-partisan protest character at that moment by stating: “before we want to reinvent the politician, we want to reinvent the citizen” (Vasilcoiu 2012). Burean and Badescu (2013, 15–16) conducted research on one of the key protesting groups in 2012 – the students – and found that gender and income affected protest participation, but also that distrust and online activism had a positive effect on contentious activities.

At the same time, the Boc resignation brought the Social Democrats back into power (within the Social-Liberal Union, where the opposition found a joint cause in opposing Băsescu), and Victor Ponta became the new head of the government. Smaller protests or movements followed (Internet censorship protests; Bowties Movement; Quotations Mark Protest; cf. Margarit 2016b), but with less success. However, the groundwork for a more active society was led, or as journalist Laura Ștefănuț noted, Romania’s had its “civic awakening” (Ștefănuț 2017).

2.4 Romania’s Autumn in 2013

The Romanian Autumn\(^\text{13}\) protest episode was labelled as the “revival of citizen's participation” (Stoiciu 2016, 57) or as “a new political wakening among the post-communist generation” (Deletant 2015, 234). It began on September 1\(^\text{st}\) 2013 in Bucharest and consisted of the largest up to that date mass-protests in Romania since 1989. Within a very short timeframe, the contention spread across Romania and even spilled over to the diaspora community.

Some civic actors from 2012 reorganized in response to a law drafted by PSD-led government that reintroduced a possibility of a mining project in Roșia Montană. Yet there was a number of underlying causes that triggered anger in various groups and individuals, such as foreign capital vs. national economy,

\(^{13}\) Why autumn you may ask? Well, it gives your case a greater cause, a bigger aim to pursue, to tempting is the notional connection to movements such as the Arabic Spring. Similar to the “colour revolutions”. At the same time, while Occupy-Style movements have inspired Romania’s protesters to some extent (e.g. no leaders; non-violent etc.), the country has not really experienced anything similar to the long-term occupying protest formats such as Occupy Wall Street or Indignados. However, other protests in the region and beyond, such as Bulgaria (2013), Turkey (2012) or Peru (2012 – cyanide-usage), were widely covered in Romania (Margarit 2016a, 48–52).
corruption (bribes), lack of transparency, forceful evictions, and a self-interested political class (Stoiciu 2016, 58–59).

In other words, environmental protests and the movement in protection of Roşia Montană also became a matter of general discontent regarding political disloyalty, corruption, lobbying, and the fact that political decisions were made without the consultation of citizens or relevant associations (Margarit 2016b). The proposed bill to alter the Criminal Code in favour of corrupt officials at the beginning of December 2013 (Transparency International Romania 2013) illustrated the broad nature of the “Romanian Autumn”. The bill proposal was labelled the “Black Tuesday” of Romania’s democracy by Aligică (2013), who also noted the dangers of “oligarchisation” in Romania in this context.

According to Margarit (2016a, 51) the conditions for protests “were favourable” due to “the instability and subsequent fragility of the political system, the persistence of the public opinion to demand explanations for the political decisions, and the determination to sanction the politicians for corruption, misconduct, and opportunism.” Adding to the general dissatisfaction was that, in 2013, the project was already contested and controversial for more than a decade, 14 highlighting the risks of cyanide use in the gold extraction process. Thus, the “explosion of citizens’ and activists’ dissatisfaction” in September 2013 was an output of a long anti-mining campaign and triggered by the draft law, but “its roots and its implications are much more complex” (Stoiciu 2016, 57). The anti-fracking protests against shell gas exploitation in Pungești only fuelled the protests and the demands quickly went beyond environmental issues.

The protest manifestations on every Sunday lasted for nearly half a year through February 2014. The contention – primarily organized via Facebook – manifested through variety of action performances, including street demonstrations, marches, flash mobs, human chains, roadblocks and civil disobedience. 15 Worth noting are the marches that took place in the neighbourhoods of Bucharest so as to raise awareness of such protests in response to the quiet, lobby-owned Romanian media (Ciobanu 2013). A direct outcome of the collective action in 2013 was a new type of network: “#UnițiSalvăm”. 16 Their mobilisation potential was also due to their heterogeneity and insistence on being non-identical, which ultimately attracted not only leftist environmental groups for protest marches, but rather dissatisfied and angry citizens of all political leanings, such as small nationalist groups.

14 A large informal coalition of NGOs and academia members were working against it, often in cooperation with international networks. Focus was on campaigns, studies or reports.
15 A variety of pictures from the first month of protesting (September 2013), showing different actions, can be seen at Vasile (2013).
16 “#UnițiSalvăm” (Together We Save) was used as a protesting chant. The network was initiated at the beginning of September 2013 and became active on Facebook on September 4th. They see themselves as a civic, heterogeneous, trans-ideological, leaderless and informal platform. For more information see https://www.facebook.com/unitisalvam/.
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Stoiciu (2016, 61–64) highlights an interesting paradox: Many participants pointed at the apolitical character of the protests, while they are “purely political” – against the political elite and their “para-politics”. This is because, in Romania, politics are conceived as institutional by nature and are negatively stigmatized. Therefore, activists have distanced themselves primarily from parties and politicians. As such, protesters claimed to be apolitical, while they were actually non-partisan.

As a consequence of the protests, the proposed law was dropped and, additionally, inner-political struggles within the governing UCL-alliance led to a break-up as PNL left the government (Ro Insider 2014). More importantly, an informal network, which managed to quickly mobilise and raise awareness beyond the local issues – even reaching the diaspora – was formed. The aim was, as Crăciun stated: “People today confront a corrupted political class backed up by a corporation and a sold out media; and they ask for an improved democratic process, for adding a participatory democracy dimension to traditional democratic mechanisms” (Ciobanu 2013).

2.5 Presidential Elections 2014 and Colectiv Fire 2015

This new civic power, albeit not yet widely accepted in Romania’s society, became again visible in 2014 during the presidential run-off. This time, when protesters returned in solidarity with the diaspora due to voting issues abroad (Stavila 2014), the immense diaspora community had a big impact as they were clearly favouring Iohannis, but mostly in defiance of Ponta. In the end, prime Minister Victor Ponta from the PSD lost the run-off due his over-confidence and underestimation of the “mobilizatory power of the social media” (Deletant 2015, 234). The electoral outcome illustrated that it was not primarily people switching their votes in the two weeks, but rather Ponta supporters opting out of voting, while those in favour of Iohannis were noticeably mobilised (Bădescu 2017). The mobilizing effect of the diaspora was a key factor, as families and friends votes back home contributed their votes (Volintiru 2014). Many people contacted relatives in Romania, encouraging them to either stay at home (if PSD supporters) or to go out and vote for Iohannis (Feşnic 2017).

The key political consequence was that, for the first time, protests directly affected the outcome of an election. So far, they key achievements were the withdrawals of proposed laws and political resignations. Still, this does not necessarily mean improvement. Systematic difficulties of Romania’s body intend to stay in place as only heads were exchanged. Volintiru (2014) sees this rising engagement as something which will stay: “the Romanian electorate seems poised to assume political engagement, along the lines of a civic duty”.

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Smaller protest events took place in May 2015, when several thousand people in key cities were demonstrating for environmental rights, particularly against illegal logging. The protest activists, associated with #UnițiSalvăm, declared once again their “apolitical” character (Popescu 2015). This environmental and legal issue, similar to Roșia Montană, involved corruption, opaque national and local politics, as well as international companies as stakeholders and lobbyists. As summarized by Margarit (2016b): “an intricate affair mixed up with corruption and particular interests of Romanian politicians and oligarchs”. An Austrian company, Holzindustrie Schweighofer, was under focus after having been accused of heavy illegal logging activities (Vaughan 2015). Despite legal changes due to the protests, the issue remains unsolved with primary forests being cut every day.

The biggest protests in 2015 occurred in late October and November 2015, after a fire in a Bucharest club called Colectiv killed 63 people and injured almost 150 (Neagu 2016). This tragic incident once more revealed the potential consequences of local corruption and inadequate health care systems. The club was beyond its occupancy maximum, yet legal conditions were ignored, local authorities were bribed, and hospitals had insufficient resources to take care of wounded. “Corupția ucide” (Corruption kills) became the main slogan and a Facebook platform. Florin Bădiță, a young activist who already initiated the 2012 protests via Facebook events, created the Corruption kills Facebook page as well (Bădiță 2017). This aspect is important, as the narrative changed: Within the first days of protest, the left-environmentalist groups were delegitimized with the help of media and anti-corruption became the key message from that point on (Petruț 2017).

The following protests were labelled as “Colectiv Revolution” and after several ten thousands of people protested in Bucharest alone, resignations of prime Minister Ponta, his government and the mayor of the Bucharest district where the protests took place soon followed (Tran 2015). Ponta’s resignation must also be considered with regard to the ongoing investigation into his conduct and the fact that he had refused previous calls for his resignation. As such, one interpretation could be that Ponta’s resignation came at an opportune moment, done in response to an issue where he had no direct responsibility to save what was left of his political credibility for potential future engagements.

Only a few days after the resignations in early November, president Iohannis also invited civil society actors and informal protest leaders to a meeting to discuss necessary reforms. This was the first that a leading political figure actively engaged with activists and experts from civil society. Their presence and influence has certainly increased since. Yet it is still uncertain to what extent their suggestions were feasible within the remaining year in the presidential cycle. This one year was conducted, again for the first time in

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17 See for more information e.g. Greenpeace Romania (2015) report.
18 More on this meeting and a potential list of who has attended this meeting, see Dumitru (2015).
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Romania’s political history, by a technocratic government under the leadership of Dacian Cioloș (Margarit 2016b). However, this technocratic government was only partially technocratic in nature, as members of the regular political class secured positions in exchange for approval (Surubaru 2015), as the parliament has remained the same.

2.6 Anti-Corruption Protests in February 2017

Surprisingly, 2016, with both a technocratic government and two key elections (local and parliamentary), was rather quiet. The biggest protests in Romania’s post-revolution history occurred near the end of January and early February of 2017. Night after night, citizens poured out into the streets to defend rule of law, regardless of Romania’s particularly harsh winters.

PSD’s very successful election campaign – verbally promising benefits for those in economic difficulties (Stoica 2017) and a government coalition with ALDE – the Social Democrat Party leader Liviu Dragnea was blocked from becoming prime minister due to sentencing against him regarding electoral fraud (HotNews 2017a). The first party choice and close associate of Dragnea was former minister Sevil Shhaideh, who would have become the first female and Muslim PM. However, president Iohannis – by stretching the constitution, as there is no mention regarding the refusal of an advocated prime minister – declined the proposal to the surprise of many (Stoica 2016). After a brief political quarrelling, the second nomination, Sorin Grindeanu and his cabinet were sworn in on January 4.

Strengthened by an overwhelming electoral win, PSD went head on with their agenda, but not with their election promises. Instead, PSD decriminalized and pardoned their own people – including Dragnea himself. Changing the Criminal Code via Emergency Ordinance (circumventing parliament and president) to decriminalize corruption offences and the law on pardon/amnesty was among the new government’s first policies (Brett 2017). On January 18, president Iohannis attended the government meeting for the first time in his presidency to discuss these kind of “hidden” law changes (cf. Selejan-Guțan 2017). Although street protests started that day and criticism came not only from the president but also from think tanks, opposition, and judicial experts, the government tried to push through the ordinance to decriminalize abuse of office, albeit slightly changed, in a night-meeting on 31st January – without even having it on the official agenda (Băiaș 2017). The particularity of these emergency decrees is that they enter in force once

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19 In a move very similar to Aleksander Vučić’s choice for PM after his election as president in 2017, the first female and gay head of government Ana Brnabić (cf. Crosby 2017).
20 For instance, offences leading to less than 200.000 Lei (~44.000€) would not result in any legal punishment. As this law would have a retrospective effect, it would have, to no surprise, benefited PSD leader Liviu Dragnea (cf. Selejan-Guțan 2017). In addition, Dragnea currently faces a prosecution for office abuse, which could result in conviction and prison – an issue which would have been resolved with the attempted decriminalization of office abuse (cf. Meuser 2017a).
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published in the *Monitorul Oficial*. This time, however, there was a ten-day holding clause in the final version, disallowing immediate effects (Olteanu 2017b, 8–10).

This sparked outrage among citizens, first in Bucharest, then quickly went beyond to cities across the country and the diaspora. Despite violence, it was intended to be a peaceful protest. One of the key slogans was ‘like thieves in the night’, due to the over-night attempt to modify the Criminal Code (Odobescu and Bird 2017). On February 2nd, approximately 300.000 citizens poured into the streets across Romania, with 150.000 in Bucharest alone – marking once again the biggest protests in post-revolution Romania (Dimitriu 2017). This also led to discrepancies in the PSD. For instance, the minister for Business Environment, Commerce, and Entrepreneurship Florin Jianu resigned, claiming that his morality would not allow supporting this change of law (Grigoras Butu 2017). Strong criticism also came from Mihai Chirica, a PSD representative and current major of Iași (Ziarul de Iași 2017). This illustrates that, even though the Social Democratic Party is known for its strong discipline, inner party critics on Dragnea and his policy exist.

Protests continued and increased, cumulating on February 5th with an estimation of 500.000 people on the streets across Romania (HotNews 2017b). The same day, there was the first direct consequence of the protests when PM Grindeanu revoked OUG13/2017. In 2017, once again a new movement established itself through the protests. Among others, two people worth mentioning here Mihai N. Tudorica, a former expat, created the Facebook page “6000000 pentru Resistenta” (600.000 for Resistance), and Andrei Roșu, an extreme sportsmen who became known for launching the Facebook group “#Resistența” and opening his “office” in front of the government building at Victoria Square during the protests in February 2017 (Spridon 2017).

Some observers quickly labelled the 2017 protests as a “second democratic revolution” in Romania (Zbytniewska 2017). While the impact, and even more so, the mobilization was indeed remarkable, it was, in retrospect, a premature label. Protests continued, but the masses withdrew from the streets after the government revoked the law change. Many questions remain: What is left of the protests after five years of citizens becoming more and more active?; How can this non-institutionalized participation be channelled into long-term social change? Volintiru and Țînțariu (2017) even ask whether these protests, simply challenging the status quo, will bring democratic improvement in Romania?

The following chapter will look at political consequences of these five years of increasing activism and protest culture. The establishment of a new party had an impact in 2016 – whether directly or indirectly through protests, needs to be discussed.

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21 In a video from the night of 31th of January the anger and frustration among citizens is very palpable. After the government’s decision became known, thousands turned out late in the night to protest in front of the government building (Adevarul 2017). A more general documentation about the protests and the anti-corruption fight in Romania was made by Al Jazeera (2017).
2.7 Initial Political Consequences

Political consequences of contentious politics can, inter alia, encompass changes in policies, agenda setting, and political institutions or regimes. Before turning towards the individual outcomes of the key protest episodes between 2012 and 2017, two primary processes are observable in Romania: Mobilisation and scale-shift, both of which influence one another.

While it would certainly be fruitful to look into each of the protest episodes individually to highlight the mechanisms at play, this thesis looks at the bigger picture of five years of protests as one stream of contention. Mobilisation, primarily via Facebook, has become the key instrument in Romania. Kriesi (2008, 150) noted that political mobilisation can occur anywhere and at anytime, as illustrated in 2012. Mobilisation, as understood by Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 120) is an increase of resources for collective claim making. While mobilisation was mostly reactive to state policies, two mechanisms are visible: diffusion and coordinated action (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 31). Diffusion explains how contention spread from one side to another, e.g. from Roşia Montană to Bucharest, from Târgu Mureş to Bucharest, and from Bucharest to other cities. At the same time, different actors such as environmental groups coordinated their contention and actions against the state with other civic groups, resulting in a stronger claim-making campaign. Margarit (2016a, 56), by looking at the 2013 protests, pointed out that the direct and indirect causal influences resulting in such significant mobilization remain unanswered. A relatively closed political system with low participation levels certainly contributed to the anger of citizens. This reactive character of the protests also included quick demobilisation once the main risk was off the table.

The upward scale-shift process, similar to diffusion, moves the contention from local origins (e.g. environmental sites) to national levels, involving new actors (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 125). This shift activated new actors in other locations (mostly Bucharest) and, with the help of Facebook, involved an increasing number of individuals and groups. Informal networking groups were built first in Bucharest, and later in other key cities throughout Romania and the diaspora. This is important, as “the effects of one movement have gone beyond its expressly articulated goals to shape the larger social movement sector” (Meyer and Whittier 1994, 293).

Generally, most collective action is directed at policy alterations – although the main political consequence of movements are considered to be the “extension of democratic rights and practices and the formation of new political parties” (Amenta et al. 2010, 289–91). In Romania, the political consequences of the protests thus far include changes of government, policy change and political institutions – in particular through the indirect strengthening of a new party. It must be stressed that these policy-oriented actions were mostly reactive to state policies or “event-driven” (Olteanu 2017b, 14).
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The year 2014 marked the only period in which protests had a direct influence on institutional participation thus far, as thousands protested against Ponta, enabling Iohannis’s presidency. This reach for influence through direct electoral support is a generally under-researched aspect of movements (Amenta et al. 2010, 297). McAdam and Tarrow (2010, 533–34) termed this as proactive electoral mobilisation, which occurs when the movement sees either a potential threat or opportunity in elections. The direct political consequences of the Colectiv fire protests in 2015 were the resignation of PSD prime minister Ponta and the establishment of the first technocrat government in Romania under Cioloș.

In 2012, the protests resulted in the resignation of the Boc cabinet. The 2013 protests led the political elite to drop the proposed law change on Roșia Montană – but no official political representative assumed responsibility (Margarit 2016a, 56). A similar event took place in 2017, when the government dropped the emergency decree 13 after nation-wide protests, yet only two ministers resigned. The leading political class has seemingly grown accustomed to protests, developing new methods of reaction (Olteanu 2017b, 14–15). The same goes for the police, who are becoming increasingly aggressive and strict with protesters.

Nonetheless, political and social protests were quite important in Romania and beyond. This developing culture of civil society and protest is necessary to prevent authoritarian setbacks. In Romania, this mobilization illustrates a “growing capacity” to respond to government decisions that damage the country’s democratic process (Volintiru and Țînțariu 2017). The 2015 and 2017 protests redirected the attention of protesters away from the initial attempt to revitalize the critical citizen and towards anti-corruption issues – a topic that has become the agenda of a new party as well.

2.8 Union to Safe Bucharest/Romania

As noted above, political consequences can also encompass the institutionalisation of a movement into a party or a rather indirect influence of protests and individuals through the creation of a new party. This is important for political benefits in the long-term as social and political change cannot only come from pressure through contention, but rather from within the political system (Amenta et al. 2010, 291–92).

In general, there is no question that social movements and protest groups influence party politics and the state (Goldstone 2003). The question is to what extent and how. The interaction can be manifold: From clear opposition to rather close contact or even cooperation (Schwartz 2010). Political parties can even join protests – although this is a rarity (Semenov, Lobanova, and Zavadskaya 2016). The lines between parties and movements can be quite blurred nowadays (Kriesi 2015, 667–68; Kitschelt 2006, 278; Goldstone 2003, 2). Giugni (2011, 281) has noted an additional phenomenon; Shortly, a traditional party attempts to reinvent itself as a movement.

Protest movements sometimes institutionalise into political parties in order to capitalize on their popularity and to articulate collective interests in regular politics. The transition from a rather lose group into an
institutionalised organisation and the lack of problem solving across topics beyond the movement’s aim are key issues for movement parties, and the barriers are often too high (Kitschelt 2006, 278–81). White (2015, 314–16) argues that, furthermore, protests often demand planning and that they require both civil and political society in order to successfully challenge authoritarian practices as democratic opposition. This political society, consisting of those who do not belong to a particular group but still engage in protests (Linz and Stepan 1996, 8), is as essential to a vivid and functioning democracy as political institutions. Mobilisation is a crucial driver for political change, and the interaction between protests and parties is key (LeBas 2011, 8). This change, however, needs sustained efforts by civil and political society in order to upkepp the pressure on the political class in both contention and institutional participation.

In Romania’s case, it was less so a movement or protest network institutionalising into a party, but rather an already active political group attempting to capitalize on the protest atmosphere by formerly creating a new party. As the following analysis will show, the key new party in Romania – with relative success for a newcomer – fits into Hanley and Sikk’s (2014, 523) description of an anti-establishment reform party, including three key features: mainstream reformism, anti-establishment appeal, and genuine newness. Their findings suggest that (a perception of) corruption is a main factor in determining the success of such parties, rather than the economic or political crisis.

In Romania’s 2016 election year, there was a new, anti-corruption, catch-all party, which was indirectly linked to the protests (e.g. support) and civil society (e.g. through actors). First, for the local elections in June as the Union to Save Bucharest (Uniunea Salvați Bucureștiul – USB) and for the parliamentary elections as the party expanded to Union to Save Romania (Uniunea Salvați România – USR). Interestingly, Volintiru (2017) stated that USR can be seen as an attempted anti-establishment party, though an unsuccessful one in her opinion, as their heterogeneous character is a key obstacle.

USB was founded in July 2015 by Nicușor Dan and is a direct consequence of the association Save Bucharest, which has existed for almost a decade. Dan has been a well-known Bucharest activist for quite some time. After his mathematics studies in Paris in the 1990s, he returned to Bucharest in 1998 with the aim to change Romania. In 1999, he founded the association Youth for Civic Action (Asociația Tineri pentru Acțiune Civică) and in 2008 he started with the aforementioned Asociația Salvați Bucureștiul. In 2012, Dan ran as an independent candidate in the local elections for Bucharest. Journalist Negruțiu (2012), with a plea for people to vote, described Dan as unlikely to become mayor, as he cannot attract the masses with his atypical and rather serious style of engaging with politics. Nonetheless, he managed to get around 8,5% of

22 More information about Dan can be found at his website: https://www.nicusordan.ro/cine-sunt/.
the votes with the help of a few influential people and volunteers who wanted to change the way politics work in the capital (Teniță 2017).

With the creation of the party USB in 2015, Dan and his associates declared their intention to continue the effort of the anti-corruption agency DNA – to clean the public administration of Bucharest and give the city a vision again. The agenda and program was clear: anti-corruption and pro-transparency (good governance in general), without any ideological constraints (Ivanov 2015). The party, in particular Dan as candidate for major, achieved a very respectable result (30.52%) in the 2016 local elections in Bucharest, falling short only to PSD (42.97%) and almost winning one of the six districts (Sector 1).23

Due to the relative success for a new party in the local elections, USB decided to run as Union to Safe Romania in the parliamentary elections as well. Within months, Dan and his associates were trying to organize a party in as many other cities and districts as possible. Politicians (some from the technocrat government), entrepreneurs, and people from civil society joined them, many without much political experience and very different ideological standpoints (Peca 2017; Jiglău 2017). Their program stayed very similar: No ideological pattern, with a focus on anti-corruption and good governance. Their “10 priorities”, for instance, focus on education, health, infrastructure, and the development of rural areas.24 Tăpălagă (2016), by analysing the political program of USR, wrote that the party program is actually right-centre. Their program focuses on neo-liberal economics, leaving social aspects (poverty etc.) out. In conclusion, Hanley and Sikk’s (2014, 522) characterisation of an anti-system party are met; It maintains a mainstream ideology, fierce anti-establishment rhetoric, demands for reforms, and transparency while proclaiming new political methods.

For the rapidity of its establishment and for being relatively unknown outside Bucharest, USR accomplished a respectable result in the parliamentary elections in December 2016 (8.92%). The extent to which USR has profited from the 2015 protests directly is up for debate. Yet there is no doubt that general awareness has increased. In the election campaign, there were also talks about Dacian Cioloș, the former PM during the technocrat government, joining USR as candidate. Although this did not play out, with Cioloș being a disastrous candidate for PNL, it gave USR more visibility countrywide.25

Eventually, the quick build up in 2016 with an agenda on anti-corruption, good governance, and the promise of doing politics differently, was not enough to keep the party together. People from different ideological backgrounds have come together, making the base of the party very heterogeneous and institutionally weak. Political scientist Cosmin Gabriel Marian, a strong critic of the new party, mentioned that discontent was the cohesive factor for the party, and that they had no real party program (Marian

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23 For more information on the results of the 2016 local elections in Bucharest see http://alegeri.roaep.ro/?alegeri=alegeri-locale-2016.
25 E.g. a launched, yet not agreed, campaign “Dacian Cioloș. Finally, you have someone!” (Rosca 2016).
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2017). This became publically visible when Nicușor Dan left the party in June 2017, after party-intern discussions took place on the controversial and regressive Family Referendum (DIGI24 2017b). This controversy continues to split the party, as they cannot focus on their main agenda and are forced to take positions on an opinion-dividing issue (Bădescu 2017). This, of course, also helps the parties in power, which, backed by the strong Orthodox Church in Romania, see this as a welcoming distraction. Since Dan has officially resigned, the current interim leader has been Elek Levente, the former vice-president and leader of USR Cluj (Popescu 2017).

The “burden of being in power” seems omnipresent for USR (Volintiru 2017). Bolleyer and Bytzek (2016, 8) have shown that new parties face difficulties to be re-elected, especially if they lack institutionalization and support before entering parliament (or an early change of leadership). Time will show the ways in which this lack of institutionalisation and stable party support will affect USR in Romania, as a strong party base is the key to uphold oppositional pressure (LeBas 2011, 15). At the moment, it seems as though ideological differences, paired with a volatile support base, especially on a national level, will lead to a break-up or split of the party (Teniță 2017).

At this point, much smaller party groups are also evolving out of the protests and the renewed civic engagement and political interest in Romania. In May 2017, a small group of protesters formed the party Alianța Strada (Street Alliance), which seeks to include street protests into the political sphere: “With today, the street enters politics” (Mănoiu 2017).26 Another civic-political platform that plans on turning into a party is DEMOS. Launched in September 2016 (Realitatea.net 2016), DEMOS is a group of young, mostly urban and intellectual individuals attempting to fill the empty space of social and environmental politics in Romania through new means of participation in contrast to the established cartel-parties.27

Time is the most important aspect in the analysis of the success of new parties. While the Union to Save Bucharest had a great breakthrough in the local elections and USR achieved a good result in the national elections, it is unclear how this party will develop. It seems for now that the anti-system and anti-corruption stance brought them together (and brought them votes). Yet it is unclear whether this is enough to keep the heterogeneous support in line. In this regard, DEMOS is certainly more interesting, as it comes with the good governance aspect in addition to having a clear ideological background – which is however quite contrary to the strong conservative and neo-liberal tenor in Romania. In any case, only the next elections will bring further insights into the institutionalisation of protest-affiliated parties in Romania.

26 For more information see their website: https://aliantastrada.wordpress.com/about/; or their Facebook Group, which currently has around 1.200 members: http://bit.ly/2uXTkdY. (Accessed 30.07.2017).
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2.9 Conclusion

The first chapter has shown that although Romania had its own (violent) revolution in 1989, it did not result in an active citizenry. During the 90s, when organisations were funded by internationals and oppressed by a semi-autoritarian state, people were more concerned with economic survival than political engagement. Considering pro-democracy organisations, Romania was rather quiet. The 2000s had their first successful movements (with international support) and a general consolidation of the civil society sector due to legal improvement, due to EU-accession pressure.

Widespread contentious politics affecting the state started in 2012 and has seen an enormous mobilisation and scale-shift process since then; A few thousand protesters in 2012 became about half a million in February 2017. This illustrates the potential and success of the protest organisers, all of which started as small groups and later expanded quickly to, first, the Uniți Salvăm network, and then to several others as well.

The direct political consequences can be considered successful. Laws were dropped and governments had to resign. This civic power became also visible in the 2014 elections, when, together with the diaspora, protesters mobilized against Ponta and made Iohannis president. However, 2017 shows that also the political class grew accustomed to these protests and was less affected (as only two ministers resigned in February 2017). The problem stems from the fact that, despite the initial successes, the systemic issues in Romania are persistent (Ștefănuț 2017). The new anti-system and anti-corruption party USR, with ties to both protests and civil society, illustrates that initiatives in Romania’s political landscape that seek to create a longer lasting impact exist. Whether USR will be the party to bring political change and a new political culture in Romania is questionable at this point, but perhaps more parties (like DEMOS or the Platform România 100 by Cioloș28) with a stronger organisational background and identity will be able to enter parliament and make lasting impacts.

When considering these as direct political consequences (policy, government, institutions), then there are also other, more subtle consequences visible in Romania. In the next chapter, the first part will show how voter turnout has stagnated, bringing the corrupt political class back in power in 2016 despite rising non-institutional participation and new anti-system and good governance parties. The following subchapter on the more indirect consequences of this new protest culture and civic activism will discuss why hope and optimism persist nonetheless when looking at Romania’s democracy.

28 See for further information about the Platform 100, led by the former PM Dacian Cioloș: https://www.ro100.ro/.
Democracy rests upon citizen participation. The introductory quote shows that, in democratic theory, participation is seen as a dominant method to hold the political class accountable. Thus, in order to achieve sufficient levels of democratic quality, citizen participation is, inter alia, a key element (Croissant and Merkel 2004). This is exemplified by the definition of democratic quality given by Diamond and Morlino (2004, 23–24):

"With regard to participation, democratic quality is high when we in fact observe extensive citizen participation not only through voting but in the life of political parties and civil society organizations, in the discussion of public policy issues, in communicating with and demanding accountability from elected representatives, in monitoring official conduct, and in direct engagement with public issues at the local level."

Kostelka (2014, 963) notes that the poor participation levels in the post-communist region "seriously undermine the quality of the democratic process". This can be seen in the Romanian case as well, not only via low turnout rates, but also, as chapter one has shown, through an electoral system that discourages representation and accountability for politicians. The quality of democracy should be a concern for both citizens and politicians (Haerpfer 2011, 627).

As outlined in the introduction, this thesis operates on a rather broad conception of political participation (Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian 2016, 6). Institutional participation is organized by the political elite or occurs within the political system. Non-institutionalized participation is to challenge said elite either through attempts to directly influence or to bypass the political system (cf. Hooghe and Quintelier 2014, 216; Marien, Hooghe, and Quintelier 2010, 188). Generally, citizens have a “whole array of possible participation acts, ranging from voting to party activism to illegal protest” at their disposal (Hooghe 2010, 205). However, this reach is not only a matter of resources and values, but is also partially determined through a historical process that consists of cultural and political traditions of participation (Andretta 2013b). In the Romanian context, the communist legacies and participation practices are important to note when looking at levels of participation, particularly after the 1989.

This chapter examines institutional participation. Simon Hix’s research finds that, since the early 2000s, non-voters have turned into the biggest share of potential voters group in Europe (including west, central and eastern Europe). This increase of people not voting, however does not necessarily and generally mean that people lost interest (Oxenham 2017). Thus, the next chapters will look into the institutional participation levels in Romania (3.1), the potential causes of a low institutional participation levels (3.2), the
3 Political Participation

effects of increased non-institutionalized participation so far (3.3), the effects of the new anti-
establishment party (3.4), and the extent of influence for both (non-institutionalised levels and new party) 
on institutional participation (3.5). The conclusion also briefly discusses whether this is a particular case or a 
general phenomenon across the central-eastern-south eastern European region.

3.1 Institutional Participation Levels

When it comes to institutional participation, two indicators are important, albeit more exist (e.g. court 
appeals, participation in public hearings etc. (cf. Rucht 2012, 128; Grasso 2016, 14): (1) Voting in elections 
or referenda’s; (2) party membership. This chapter seeks to investigate what types of institutional 
participation exist in Romania. Before focusing on the results, party membership in Romania is briefly 
examined.

3.1.1 Party Membership

Party membership is a very traditional and declining aspect of representative democracy. The very low 
membership levels in east central Europe are problematic as they have “a detrimental impact on recruiting 
new political elites, but also because [they are] negatively related to political participation” (Cabada 2013, 
77). For Romania, different numbers are presented in the literature. According to van Biezen, Mair, and 
alyses the official numbers between 2003 and 2012 and finds that 1.3M people were subscribed as 
“founding party members” in 2007 (a decline since 2003, but stable in comparison to 2012). This indicates 
that actual party membership numbers are difficult to determine in detail. However, it nonetheless 
illustrates the decline of party membership to a considerably low rate – a common trend. This speaks to 
Cabada’s argument (2013, 88) that “lower membership consequently means lower pressure on intra-party 
competition, at the expense of quality”. In Romania, this disinterest in intra-party competition was shown 
in the first chapter and, together with low levels of confidence in parties, explains citizens’ unwillingness to 
directly engage with parties.

3.1.2 Referenda as Direct Democracy Tools

Direct democracy has three main means: (1) referendum, (2) citizens’ initiative, and (3) the recall of elected 
representatives (cf. Maduz 2010; Doerr 2013). In this part, referenda are at the core of the analysis. 
Referendums in Romania thus far have been regarding the constitution (1991, 2003), presidential 
(2016, 74) considers these instruments to be important at a national level when used as a “weapon” 
against the political opposition, and observes that such weapons are less often used by grassroots civil
initiatives at local levels. The turnout for these referendums varied depending on the subjects, as Figure 1 shows. The referenda in 1991 is questionable in terms of accuracy and a democratic procedure. With the exception of the electoral system referenda in 2007, which was only half a year after the presidential impeachment, the turnout seems to be rather stable at 45 to 55 percent over the last 15 years.

<table>
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<td>55.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential impeachment</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>44.45</td>
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<td>2012</td>
<td>46.24</td>
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<td>2007</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>50.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Figure 1:** Turnout for referendums in Romania post-1989. Source: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă, 2003–2012; Nohlen and Stöver (2010).

### 3.1.3 Election Turnout

Voting remains as one of the most important aspect of institutional participation. It is therefore pivotal to analyse election turnout data in Romania for the last 27 years. In this paper, the turnout for parliamentary, local, and presidential elections receives a closer look. First, all three analysed categories are combined to present a general picture of voter turnout. Figure 2 shows that turnout was generally high in the 1990s, then dropped in the 2000s and is now relatively stable – and low.

**Figure 2:** Voter turnout in Romania, 1990–2016, for parliamentary, local and presidential elections.

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29 EU elections have an even lower turnout than the other ones, a trend, which seems to be regular across Europe. 2007 = 29.47%; 2009 = 27.67%; 2014 = 32.44% (Source: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă).

30 Note: Data for parliamentary elections is always from the election for the Chamber of Deputies. Source for all voting data, including following figures, if not declared otherwise: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă.
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This “post-honeymoon period” (Letki 2004, 666) in the early transformation included a decline in institutional participation on several levels. As Cinpoes (2015, 114–16) noted, participation in regards to parliamentary and presidential elections had a “downward trajectory”, symmetrically declining for both until 2004. This drop also stems from very high expectations during the early transformation, followed by a harsh return to reality (Feșnic 2017) with economic difficulties by the end of the 90s. It also shows that the year 2004 was the last year in which presidential and parliamentary elections were held together in general elections – afterwards voter turnout was altered for both elections. Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuş (2009, 10–17), who thoroughly analysed voter turnout (1990–2008), showed that the difference between rural and urban turnout has increased to ~8% in 2008. With regard to local elections, it is observable that they never enjoyed high levels, but also did not drop further.

The very high turnout in the 1990s has several explanations. First, during communism, regimes enjoyed displaying their high mandatory participation levels (Kostelka 2014, 946). This led to a situation where, for the first decade after the fall of communism, people were more likely to utilize their right to vote due to personal empowerment and independence (Carothers 2006, 63). Second, as some of the interviewees expressed, voting on election day had become a habit since the mandatory participation under communism. Those, who experienced decades under authoritarian rule were either unable to drop habits in short periods (Petruț 2017) or now enjoyed their freedom to vote more enthusiastically (Grama 2017). Third, according to Comșa (2012, 69), Romania’s early post-communist elections, particularly those which cannot really be considered as fully democratic elections in 1990 and 1992, resulted in high turnout levels due to electoral fraud – increasing the turnout (estimations go up to 10%). This, in turn, means that the turnout drop between the 1990s and 2000s would be lower than the official data suggests. This potential for fraud (e.g. multiple voting, dead voting etc.) was improved through an electoral application (Feșnic 2017).

Furthermore, many interviewees mentioned that the split from general to parliamentary and presidential elections had a crucial impact (Marian 2017), lowering voter turnout for parliament (almost 20% drop from 2004 to 2008), as many Romanians still consider the presidential election to be more important (Bădiță 2017). The importance of local and parliamentary elections is not reflected, as people tend to feel having even less influence (Grama 2017; Jiglău 2017). This shows two characteristics on recent presidential elections: The election is much more personalized, increasing public interest, and the higher turnout in the run-off illustrates increasing polarization (Cinpoes 2015, 116).

Tătar (2011) analysed what drives people to cast their vote in parliamentary elections and found that voters are either closer to a party, interested in politics, trust institutions or are better mobilised via local politicians in rural areas and networks, such as the Orthodox Church. Contrary, the next chapter will present a variety of potential causes for the aforementioned low participation levels in more detail, particularly regarding parliamentary and local elections. In addition, Bucharest will be discussed further,
where participation levels are mostly lower than the national average. Why is this important? The current Romanian government (parliamentary elections held in 2016) was elected by roughly 3.6M people (out of 18.4M) – questioning the representative character of the government. This increases the risk of further discrepancy between the elected and the electorate and leads to the establishment of a political class that disregards the opinions of those who do not participate (Kostelka 2014, 946). The following chapter discusses issues that could explain this low turnout.

3.2 Multiple Causes for Low Turnout

This chapter attempts to analyse the underlying causes for generally low institutional participation levels in Romania. Demetriou (2013, 7) has highlighted the complexity of attempting to explain citizen engagement and absenteeism, as it includes a grand variety of individual and social characteristics, which could determine voting and political behaviour. In general, research has shown that many voters simply do not have the impression that politics matter, or will matter, in their lives and that the gap between political class and citizens has become too big (Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuş 2009, 39–40). This complexity is well reflected in the interviews, where depending on the social, political or professional background, responses vary to why the majority of Romanians generally do not vote. The next part discusses those answers, all of which were in one way or another recurring. The interviewees’ responses are grouped in five main categories: (a) crisis of representation and closed political system; (b) corruption and lack of good governance; (c) disappointment, lack of confidence and political alternatives; (d) socio-economic aspects – inequalities matter, (e) emigration and residency.

3.2.1 Crisis of Representation and Closed Political System

Generally, it can be stressed that Romania has a crisis of representation, or is at least at the threshold of having one (Meuser 2017b). Or even more pointedly formulated, one could ask if there ever has been a functioning representative system in Romania? Lijphart (1997, 1) noted the far-reaching implications of low and unequal turnout: “unequal participation spells unequal influence”. Almost all interviewees referred to this crisis. Törnquist (2009, 6) identifies “authorisation and accountability based on political equality, which presuppose transparency and responsiveness” as the key essence of representative democracy. The first chapter highlighted this lack of accountability and representation when discussing the political system, parties, and the electoral system. Voters feel as though their choice is irrelevant, as politicians in Romania are all the same (Tudorica 2017) and that the opinion of the electorate, particularly younger voters, is not taken into consideration (Peca 2017). This pessimistic attitude (“my vote does not count”) can be an expression of low self-confidence, but also a result of a lack of representation and accountability (Demetriou 2013, 7).
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There are also citizens, despite their political interest and awareness, choose not to vote, as they “do not find themselves represented by the candidates” (Ștefănuț 2017). This is exemplified by one of the political active interviewees, Andreea Petruț (2017), who said that she does not vote because “I don’t want to give legitimacy to a political system or parties that do not represent me.” Contrary to this position are the citizens who believed that those who vote are better citizens than those, who do not (Jiglău 2017). They believe that voting for the lesser evil is preferred to opting out, as the perfect candidate or party will never exist.

Marien and Christensen (2013, 128) suggest that institutional participation relates to the satisfaction of how functional and open the political system is. In Romania, as interviewees stressed, the mainstream parties found that a low turnout is to their advantage (Bădescu 2017). For instance, the Social Democrats know that in parliamentary elections, a high voter turnout threatens their success, as it would decrease their percentage of votes. They can build on their traditional electorate – around 3M people, who are disciplined voters (Jiglău 2017) or like “an army of voters” (Ștefănuț 2017) – which guarantees them a high share of representation in instances of low turnout.

Furthermore, Romania had (and to some extent still has) the most restrictive electoral and party laws in the European Union (Cernea 2017). This electoral system was built in order to support traditional parties and hinder the formation of new parties, denying any kind of pluralism (Ștefănuț 2017). This issue was raised by several interviewees. Although the party law was changed, since 2015 three signatures are now needed to form a new party instead of 25,000, and the amount of signatures to stand in elections is still arbitrarily high (Teniță 2017). This eases the development of new parties, but the process remains complicated. An additional issue is the closed party list for elections, which causes low turnout, as people do not trust the parties (Jiglău 2017) nor do they know or like the candidates topping the lists. This closed party list also discourages people from engaging with party politics (Grama 2017), as they have little to no influence on the highly centralized and hierarchical structures of the traditional parties.

Ultimately, this subchapter has shown that Romania has quite a closed political system that disengages both voters as well as those who are interested in increasing their political activity within institutions. Romania lacks a responsive political class, which in turn demobilises the electorate. Yet the extent to which occurs intentionally or as a result of their actions remains to be discussed. This issue speaks to a variety of other problems, such as low confidence in institutions or the perception of a corrupt political class.

3.2.2 Corruption and Lack of Good Governance

Lack of good governance and (the perception of) corruption are highly relevant to participation levels. This had (cf. Bădescu, Sum, and Uslaner 2004) and still has a negative impact on Romania’s institutional participation: Scandals and corruption issues led to “disappointment and fatigue with the parties” (Crăciun
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2017b). These problems have become systemic over the last 27 years (Ștefănuț 2017) and no party, once in power, has tried to sought to address them. Corruption and an overall lack of good governance persist.

Governance refers to traditions and institutions of a country, including (a) government selection and monitoring, (b) effectiveness of government, and (c) citizens’ and state’s respect for institutions (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2011, 222). Thus, according to Graham, Amos, and Plumptre (2003, 1), governance is “a process whereby societies or organizations make their important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process and how they render account.” The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) have been rightly criticized for making premature assumptions based on false data (Thomas 2010). However, if the indicators are not used as determining facts, but as perceptions of governance, they still offer useful insight into why Romanians turn away from institutional politics.

![Figure 3: Worldwide Governance Indicators, Romania 2005–2015. Own figure. Source: WGI.](image)

By analysing the Worldwide Governance Indicators (2005–2015), Figure 3 shows that key aspects such as perceptions on Government Effectiveness, Control of Corruption, and Political Stability are low and well behind western European countries despite improvement. The improvement of Rule of Law and Regulatory Quality indicators over the last fifteen years is significant. Voice and Accountability, which includes participation, has remained stagnant for this period. These various dimensions enable multiple hypothesis on whether these aspects are directly or indirectly linked to political participation and the validity of such indicators. In any case, there is a need to improve good governance in Romania – a remark referring to confidence in politics (as corruption and lack of transparency prevail) and political participation. This lack of transparency and the underlying clientelistic party networks have been highlighted by an Expert Forum study (2016): Their policy brief and interactive map show how parties have transferred money (~1,5 Billion €) from diverse national funds to their regional mayors or local councils. This is not unusual unless it happens without control and transparency – resulting in a situation where the same four or five companies

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31 Governance Score (-2.5 to +2.5). Estimate of governance measured on a scale from approximately -2.5 to 2.5. Higher values correspond to better governance. Source: WGI.
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win 60–70% of the tenders. This “soporific clientelism”, particularly in the countryside, holds people back from participating in institutions (Meuser 2017b). “People think that politics is too dirty” (Cernea 2017), a phenomenon which was also highlighted by Carothers (2006, 63).

In Romania, corruption is among the key obstacles to a functioning judicial system and democracy in general, as the following quote illustrates: "All our political battles are about corruption and the rule of law" (Ioniță, quoted after Higgins 2014). The Transparency International (1998–2015) Corruption Perception Index again highlights the significance of the issue in Romania. In 1998 and 2005 Romania scored a very low 3, which slightly improved in the last decade to 44 (2012) and 46 (2015). However, these results also show that Romania, twenty-five years after regime change and seven years into the European Union, has yet to reach a positive score on the corruption index, making it one of the most corrupt countries in the EU. A Eurobarometer survey shows that 93% of surveyed individuals consider corruption to be a widespread phenomenon in Romania and 57% consider themselves personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (Special Eurobarometer 397 2014, 6).

At the same time, this instrumentalization and political discourse of corruption undermines political debate and competition, marginalizing other, sometimes more important issues (Olteanu 2012, 201). Petruț (2017) affirms this by stating that corruption has structural causes that cannot be corrected by the juridical system alone. This strong association of politics with corruption has led to citizens thinking “that it is normal to be corrupt, normal to steal” (Peca 2017). It hampers institutional participation, particularly direct involvement in politics by citizens: “Good people think that it is useless to join politics, because there are only two ways, you will be corrupted or you will be destroyed by the others, who are corrupt” (Cernea 2017).

Olteanu (2017a, 160), using a corruption databank by HotNews, finds that most high-level corruption cases involve either high-ranking politicians (local, national and EU level), ministers, or economic-political actors. While this is an indicator of high-level corruption and clientelism in Romania, it also illustrates that investigations have been focusing on such cases thus far. The aforementioned EU post-accession mechanism further displays the importance of corruption. Thus, bad governance on all levels, particularly through a lack of transparency and high levels of corruption – and the perception thereof – only further contribute to general dissatisfaction with governments and politicians in Romania.

3.2.3 Disappointment, Lack of Confidence and Political Alternatives

Lack of confidence or distrust in politics have has sparked different viewpoints on the extent to which such issues determine participation. For instance, Rucht (2012, 144) highlights them as key determinants leading to low participation levels. Lamprianou, (2013, 35–36) on the other hand, by referring to the empirical work

32 In 1998 and 2005 the Scala was from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean). In 2012 and 2015 the Scala changed from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (highly clean).
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by Quintelier and Hooghe (2012), notes that the “overall effect of trust on participation may be negligible and a researcher may find a minor causal link between the two variables”.

Anyhow, many interviewees named disappointment, distrust, and lack of options as pivotal factors for a general low turnout in Romania. Dissatisfaction with traditional parties in particular, paired with the aforementioned negative perception of politicians and politics, leads to a widespread lack of confidence in all political institutions. This distrust, disenfranchisement, dissatisfaction or, more accurately, lack of political confidence, refers to attitudes towards political actors and their policies on one hand and political institutions on the other (Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007, 67–68; Torcal 2011, 688).

This lack of confidence in political institutions has become structural in Romania due to general disillusionment after two decades of promises that have gone undelivered (Grama 2017; Jiglău 2017). This dissatisfaction and disappointment has increased with each political change in Romania (Cernea 2017), as another round of promises by traditional parties went undelivered (Petruț 2017). This goes hand in hand with the aforementioned high expectations during the 90s, which further manifested with each new election and political change. Teniță (2017) illustrated this by saying “people are not satisfied with the results, but they don’t have any other opportunities.”

This disappointment with politicians and parties is accompanied by sheer distrust in the same institutions and actors, only fuelled by corruption and Romania’s political culture in general. For instance, the issue of politicians sleeping in parliament (Jiglău 2017) is negatively shaping the image of both actors and the institution. Generally, people do not trust the political class (Tudorica 2017) nor the parties (Petruț 2017). This aspect is not only highlighted by interview partners, but can also be observed through survey data.

The following is a longitudinal analysis for political confidence in Romania. There are, of course, limitations to using survey data without cross-categorical and relation analysis. For instance, Zmerli, Newton, and Ramon Montero (2007, 62) note that findings must be used cautiously when looking at citizenship, participation, and democracy, as social attitudes and political orientations-behaviour matter and seem to be linked by life satisfaction. Nonetheless, the survey data provides good indicators on a variety of issues and is used knowing the potential shortcomings of such an approach. The institutions encompass questions about parliament, government, rule of law, civil service, police, as well as political parties as political actors. WVS provides answers to these questions in three waves, providing a good overview about the post-communist development and the current timeframe of this thesis.
Figure 4 shows that the lack of confidence in political institutions and thus a general dissatisfaction has prevailed in Romania since the end of communism. Carothers (2006, 63) notes that in new or struggling democracies, people conceive politics as a “dirty domain dominated by greed, hypocrisy, and unfairness”. The same argument says that this stems from the authoritarian and communist regime, as people who experienced one-party rule and mandatory voting are “poisoned” by the idea of party politics.

This observation can also be applied to Romania, where the lack of confidence in parliament (~87% in 2016), government (~77% in 2016) and parties (~92% in 2016) is particularly high. Furthermore, although these three institutions have repeatedly earned low levels of trust in past years, both parliament and parties shifted their response by 10% from “not very much” to “none at all”. This indicates an increasing citizen dissatisfaction with regular politics, their institutions, and policies. Studies have shown that lack of confidence in parties is fuelled by the public perception of corruption, personal enrichment, and alienation from the electorate, all in combination with the lack of intra-party democracy and participatory incentives (Webb 2002, 455–56). This gap between citizens and politics has become an underlying reason for low levels of participation.

Disappointment and lack of confidence in traditional parties leads to a situation where citizens are left with no suitable options in parliamentary or local elections. Parties have become very similar in terms of ideology or political program (see also sub-chapter 1.1.2) and thus, difficult to differentiate for dissatisfied citizens (Bădescu 2017; Cernea 2017) who lack alternatives on election day (Jiglău 2017). Crowther and

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33 World Values Survey (1998–2012) data from W3-1998, W5-2005 and W6-2012. The answers “a great deal” and “quite a lot” are combined to a positive attitude (“confidence”), while the combined answers “not very much” and “none at all” reflect a “lack of confidence”. The missing percentages represent “no answer” and “don’t know”. (N) was 1239 (1998), 3265 (2005) and 1503 (2012); INSCOP Research (2016) data from March 2016. Without “no answer” and “don’t know”. (N) was 1063.
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Suciu (2013, 382), for example, observed at the 2008 elections that “[t]he strikingly similar electoral platforms of the political parties also contribute to the low voter turnout. Among many voters, parties are simply not perceived as offering clear alternatives”. Several interviewees mentioned this lack of alternatives as well: “I believe it’s the lack of options” (Ștefănuț 2017); “A lot of people think they don’t have options anymore” (Grama 2017); “Might be that citizens grew tired of electoral options they have” (Crăciun 2017b).

Eventually, the interviews and literature suggest that a combination of these issues, reinforcing each other, can explain low voter turnout Romania. The final aspect regarding a general low turnout to be discussed here is socio-economic aspects.

3.2.4 Socio-Economic Aspects – Inequalities Matter

Socio-economic status influences political participation, whether it is age, gender, income, or education (Stolle and Hooghe 2011). Yet it is rather difficult to determine socio-economic status as a single causal explanation and it should thus be looked at in a more general manner. Quintelier and Hooghe (2013, 282) find that these affections are not only momentary, but rather impact future participation. Equal participation is a key measuring tool for the functioning of a democracy (Coffé 2013, 95) and should be desired by all democratic governments. Yet chapter 1.4 has shown the inequalities in Romania’s society. Tackling these inequalities would improve the quality of democracy by enabling more people to participate in regular political processes (Kirbiš 2013, 232).

In Romania, voting trends speak to age, education, and economic wellbeing. The interviews and literature illuminate these trends. Nonetheless, as that this analysis is not quantitative, statistics or voting behaviour analysis could easily reveal different aspects as more determinant.

Age, for instance, seems to matter, as young people tend to be less interested in politics (Tudorica 2017; Cernea 2017), while older generations have higher voter turnout (Ștefănuț 2017; Petruț 2017). The latter has also been mentioned by Crowther and Suciu (2013, 383) by stating “[t]he upper age brackets have consistently had a higher propensity to vote than the lower age brackets since 1989.” The former was also shown by Robertson (2009, 98–101), who studied youth participation in Poland and Romania. She concludes that two common assumptions underpin absenteeism among young voters: (1) personal votes do not count and (2) neither options are trustworthy. Thus, there seem to be similar issues preventing the young and middle-aged from voting, considering older citizens are more likely to vote.

Gender differences have become an important aspect to study in regards to participation. For instance, although non-institutionalised participation has increased female participation (Stolle and Hooghe 2011, 138), the gender gap remains “a meaningful source of inequality in political participation” (Coffé 2013, 95). Interestingly enough, none of the interviewees spoke of this gap, as no question directly addressed it.
Nonetheless, gender remains a subject worth studying regarding political participation within a very traditional and rather conservative country.

Two more aspects are worth considering when discussing participation levels, one of which is economic inequality in Romania. Some assumptions argue that the poor are more likely to vote, as they are more adequately addressed by PSD through electoral campaigns and that they are part of the clientelistic structures persisting in the countryside. But one key problem remaining, as highlighted by Claudiu Crăciun (2017b), is that the “poorest of the poor don’t vote”, sometimes even due to the lack of IDs. This economic inequality impacts political participation and thus the health of a democracy (Solt 2008, 57). As chapter 1.4 has shown, poverty is a crucial issue in Romania. This problem is exponentially worse among marginalized communities, which, in addition to their economic struggles, often face legal issues as well – e.g. lack personal identification documents, which automatically denies them political participation in general.

Second, the interviewees have mentioned education several times as an important factor for non-voting. Ștefănucț (2017) stated that there is a lack of understanding of “how important the vote is” and how democratic institutions work in Romania. The general lack of education regarding democracy and citizenship were raised by Grama and Cernea (2017). Once more, Robertson’s (2009, 88) study on youth revealed a similar suggestion: “In Romania, respondents generally felt that there was a complete lack of civic education in schools and that they were positively discouraged from discussion of politics and democracy.” Furthermore, as noted earlier, citizens find presidential elections to be more important than local or parliamentary elections. Bădita and Tudorica (2017) traces this mentality back to the lack of education. Education gives way to an “informed citizenry” – a key aspect of a functioning democracy that “prevent[s] elites from pursuing essentially their own interests, and [...] contribute[s] to a more balanced sharing of responsibility within the community” (Rucht 2012, 144). Higher education results in more critical awareness towards the political class (Quintelier and Hooghe 2013, 274), which in turn could decrease turnout among this group in Romania.

Another aspect, albeit less determining, is the difference between rural and urban areas. Interviewees, when asked about voting differences countryside and big cities, pointed at the diminishing differences between voter turnout (Bădescu 2017; Jiglău 2017). Marian (2017) added that mobilisation is easier in rural areas due to clientelistic, religious, or kinship networks, making rural electorate “more predictable” (Crăciun 2017b). Electoral studies have shown that there is an urban/rural divide when it comes to voting behaviour, but the key discrepancy nowadays seems to be regarding voting preferences. Poverty, less education, and clientelistic networks matter in the countryside (Crowther and Suciu 2013, 376). Many interviewees responded similarly, highlighting the importance of local gatekeepers (Grama 2017), clientelism (Tudorica 2017), personal contact, (Teniță 2017) and manipulation (Ștefănucț 2017).
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3.2.5 Emigration and Residence

Chapter 1.4 has shown high levels of emigration from Romania for a variety of reasons (Petroff 2016, 123), resulting in a lack of expertise in important areas (Goga and Ilie 2017, 96). An estimated 1.5 million people have left the country in the last decade, and far more are commuting for work into countries like Italy, Austria, Germany etc. This is a particularly important aspect when discussing voter turnout, as only a minority of these are registered as diaspora voters. For instance, only 117,089 were registered as diaspora voters for the parliamentary elections in 2016.

Gabriel Bădescu (2017) highlighted that “the decline [of voter turnout], which is less than it seems, is also due to migration” and electoral list issues. Many emigrants, particularly those commuting, are registered in Romania (Teniță 2017), turning this into a critical obstacle, resulting in high absenteeism (Volintiru 2017). Florin Feşnic (2017) references the work of Romanian sociologist Mircea Comşa, when he highlights the increasing gap between eligible voters and registered voters.

Comşa (2012, 77–84) re-calculated voter turnout between 1990 and 2009 for presidential elections by using VEP (voting-eligible-population) instead of the usually applied VAP (voting-age-population). He suggests the number of eligible voters, if emigrants and those with mental sickness or finally convicted are subtracted, is less than 17 million people (VAP has mostly been around 18.5M recently). His calculations for presidential elections suggest that the drop in voter turnout since the 2000s, when emigration rates rose, is actually less than the official data suggests. For instance, in the 2009 presidential elections, official data reports a turnout of 54.4%, while the sociologist’s numbers suggest 65.6% as a more accurate account. This staggering 10% difference has steadily increased. Comşa (2012, 83–84) concludes that the turnout drop between 2000 and 2009 at presidential elections was only 3.1%, but also remarks that his calculations for the numbers of emigrants are estimations, rendering this data as “only approximate”.

However, it has been shown that high emigration rates are distorting official voter turnout, suggesting that it could actually be around 10% more, if those who cannot cast their vote on election day due to physical absence, are subtracted. Numbers could be even higher for parliamentary elections.

The residency issue is not only in terms of cross-border emigration, but also internal migration. This is particularly important when it comes to voter turnout and behaviour in cities, as rural depopulation increases. A recent report by the World Bank highlights the importance of commuting in Romania (Cristea et al. 2017). For instance, sociologists (Mateescu 2017a) have shown the ways in which Romania’s changing demography is impacting voting behaviour in cities like Bucharest and Cluj. For parliamentary elections, which may explain a low turnout (Teniţă 2017), people can only vote in the county in which they are registered or in special voting booths, in contrast to presidential elections, where voting is possible at any...
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booth. While George Jiglău (2017) correctly holds, paraphrased, that ‘if people want to vote, they can find a way’, the current system certainly does not encourage voting, particularly amongst a population that is morally predisposed to opt out of voting. Cezara Grama (2017) has called this “limitations to voting” and Remus Cernea (2017) “restrictive for those who vote”. The study of Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuș (2009, 61) came to the same conclusion. Both Jiglău (2017) and Grama (2017) note that students received free transport on election day in order to reach their home counties. While the former perceived this as an improvement, the latter suggested that many could have used it as a free transport home, without caring much about casting a vote. Again, the system provides possibilities for voting, but does not seem to encourage a disenfranchised and disillusioned electorate that is already averse to making an effort to vote.

Many of the aforementioned factors reflect the findings of Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuș (2009, 41–48), who mention, inter alia, economic aspects, education, age, political system, context and informal factors as main causal explanations for the turnout decline. To conclude this chapter on the general causes for low institutional participation levels in Romania, it must be stressed that factors such as inequalities and education matter. Considering levels of corruption and the lack of good governance, high levels of disappointment with parties, a pivotal lack of confidence in political institutions, and a rather closed political system, Romanians have lost interest in institutional politics and lack trustworthy options at elections. Adding to this are issues of residency and diaspora. It can be noted that two important aspects of voter turnout in Romania have become less significant: (1) Electoral fraud, which allegedly issued false high turnout levels in the early 90s; (2) the discrepancy between official data and actual turnout rates. To sum up, the immense decrease of voter turnout between the 90s and the 2000s may be less than imagined. However, even if the turnout rate for parliamentary elections would be around 10% higher, it would still be considerably low, damaging Romania’s representative democratic system.

3.3 Effects of Non-Institutionalised Participation

While chapter 2.7 has mostly focused on direct political consequences, this chapter looks at the levels of non-institutionalised participation, how this has affected Romania thus far, and which outcomes are observable.

These non-institutionalised forms of participation are, no doubt, “expressions of political dissatisfaction” with the institutional political activities (Marien and Christensen 2013, 112). In general, this trend of “growing interest in new forms of citizen participation” and “disenchantment especially from professional party politics” is noticeable (Rucht 2012, 144). Yet it is crucial not to perceive this as political apathy, but rather as "a sign that participation is happening elsewhere" (Riley, Morey, and Griffin 2013, 61; cf. also

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Lamprianou, 28). Demetriou (2013, 58) noted that this “new trend calls for a more comprehensive understanding and re-conceptualization of democratic participation”, encompassing a variety of social, cultural, and political perspectives. This new wave of non-institutionalised participation can also be “cause-oriented” (Norris 2002), as the second chapter has shown for Romania.

First, there has been a visible and “significant increase” (Grama 2017) of participation in protests between 2012 and 2017. It is difficult to estimate protest participation numbers for a variety of reasons. Therefore, only approximate numbers from media outlets are presented here, as it is more worth highlighting the amount in which numbers have steadily increased in such protests. In 2012, several thousand people protested in Bucharest alone, with approx. 13.000 across the country (Mediafax 2012). More than 15.000 have apparently participated in the Roşia Montană protests and marches in Bucharest in 2013, as well as several thousands more in key cities and among the diaspora (Robu 2013). Although these numbers steadily decreased, protests persisted every Sunday for several months, similar to the 2012 protests.

Tens of thousands of people protested in and outside the country in 2014 against Ponta and for a fair electoral process. Interestingly, this time Cluj-Napoca had more participants than Bucharest (Popescu and Stanca 2014). The tragic club fire in 2015 brought around 35.000 people onto the streets in Bucharest, and between 70.000 and 100.000 nationwide (Serghescu 2015; Știrile ProTV 2015). Protests in February 2017 were estimated at 500.000 or even 600.000 protesters altogether (Libertatea 2017). Bucharest alone has seen around 150.000 people flooding the streets around Victory Square, with some calculations even going beyond 200.000, with tens of thousands of people in all key cities (DIGI24 2017a).

Thus, although more concise studies and estimations could alter these numbers, they clearly indicate the continuous increase of participation at protests in Romania. Numbers rose from a few thousand people in 2012 to around half a million people in 2017, all displaying their discontent with the emergency ordinance.

3.3.1 Impact of Protests

Many interviewees shared their opinion on the impact of protests in one form or another. An exception was Cosmin Marian (2017), who described the impact as “close to nothing”, because the majority of protesters were uninformed about political processes and lacked persistence.

Other interviewees also noted the lack of long-term impacts. For instance Jiglău (2017) remarked that “the fact that you have to protest each year is a bad sign, it means that on the long run nothing changes fundamentally”, while he also emphasized that “you have so many people standing up for the same issue matters a lot in society”. Meuser (2017b) highlighted the importance of showing society that a direct action can be successful, but also pointed to the lack of any political movement coming out of these protests. The absence of a change in institutional politics is also illustrated in a survey by protest participants in February
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2017. This survey shows that only 6% of those who protested were supporting opposition parties. Most cited OUG13 (more than 82%) and corruption (71%) as their main reasons for protesting (Stoica 2017).35 Gabriel Bădescu (2017) interestingly points to the risks of having high non-institutionalised participation levels and non-responding state institutions, which can harm the democratic process overall. Volintiru (2017) mentions the risk of destabilisation through protests. Laura Ștefănuț (2017) also states that the political elite could, in response, become more authoritarian. Generally, protests have further polarized the political culture (Grama 2017), making dialogue and necessary political compromise more difficult. It has also illuminated increasing inequalities, as many protesters represent a young, urban middle-class, while the poor and rural areas are scapegoated (Bădescu 2017). This risks further disenfranchising the lower class and poor people.

Protests certainly increased the general awareness that governmental decisions matter and can be influenced (Ștefănuț 2017), while exemplifying the possibility of a “new standard of normality” in Romania (Grama 2017). Teniță (2017) emphasizes the societal pressure deriving from protests, particularly those in February 2017. This pressure is pivotal as opposition is weak and the protests reinforced the quality of democracy, they created long-needed “informal check-and-balances” through civil society (Volintiru 2017). This affirmed by levels of satisfaction with democracy. Figure 5 shows that satisfaction, both “very satisfied” and “fairly satisfied” were lowest in 2012, but have increased since then. Whether there is a direct link between increased non-institutionalised participation and satisfaction of democracy levels is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it suggests that Romanians are again more satisfied by their democratic system, perhaps due to successful protests.

![Figure 5: Satisfaction with how democracy works. Source: Eurobarometer 2006–2016.](image)

35 Online survey conducted by the Department of Communication, Public Relations and Advertising at the Babeș-Bolyai University. N=733 and answers were multiple choice. The risks and reliability of such an online survey were mentioned before, however, it gives good indications.
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A similar aspect was noted by Stephan Meuser (2017b): Government and parties have to take potential future protests into account, as the recent years have shown that there is an increasing mobilisation potential. Grama (2017) thus states that politicians are now more careful about “what they say and what they do”. Networks that engage in monitoring and political activism have, to an extent, contributed to this.

3.3.2 More Activism, More Networks

Feşnic (2017) pointed to a key function of the protests – they brought together like-minded, critical people who were formerly mostly isolated or in small groups. Claudiu Crăciun (2017b), who has been actively engaged since 2012, noted similarly that many people who were formerly active have remained active in one way or another; The protests boosted civil society and legitimized NGOs and politically active groups.

A minority of the protesters understood that more is needed than reactive protests, and subsequently joined communities and civil society organisations or donated money, shared on Facebook, or displayed more political interest in general (Grama 2017). Catalin Teniţă (2017) pointed out that this is still not the norm, but it certainly improved societal acceptance and respect for civil society organisations and people that had invested personal resources into civic engagement.

The several networks that had developed out of the contentious episodes between 2012 and 2017 have been mentioned briefly before, such as the very informal and lose networks of Uniți Salvăm, Corupția ucide, Resistam and Insistăm or Umbrela Anticorupție and Tinerii Mânioși in Cluj. They are leaderless and mainly active as Facebook groups or pages and primarily pool and disseminate information (Ștefănuț 2017). Some of them have gathered a large following, albeit the core group is always rather small (Teniţă 2017). Stoiciu (2016, 66) gave a good general description when he writes that they “are not concerned with developing solid structures and long term platforms”, but rather “interested in creating resonances for their initiatives, interested in the impact these initiatives will have on the mainstream political actors and on society as a whole”. Thus, although there was not one main protest platform evolving, the organisational and mobilisation capacity certainly increased through the years (Volintiru 2017).

Furthermore, interviewees also mentioned these networks and initiatives as important outcomes of the protests (Bădescu 2017). Some of these more concrete groups are presented briefly, as they exemplify that political engagement by citizens occasionally went beyond protests. Bădiţă (2017) named Funky Citizens as an example of such, which was formed in 2012 and later became an official NGO. They engage with monitoring and advocacy activities, but also with civic education.³⁶ Geeks for Democracy is again a very informal and leaderless group that supports other projects with technical knowhow and engages in civic projects themselves such as Fondul pentru Democrație (Fund for Democracy), where people can donate.

³⁶ More information on Funky Citizens and their current strategy paper can be found on their website: http://bit.ly/2uojSFL.
money in a crowd-funding manner and then decide which projects should be financed. This provides projects and activities a low-threshold offer, particularly those having difficulties to find institutionalized financial support. Funky Citizens also cooperates with Geeks for Democracy, together with other organisations such as the Expert Forum, in the project Fiecare Vot Contează (Every vote counts). Their objective is to raise awareness on the importance of voting as well as election observation – in 2016 they had around 2000 volunteers (Grama 2017).37

Another group is Resistența, consisting of about sixteen people with professional backgrounds in organizing and fundraising who have decided to remain informal so as to avoid legal harassment by the state. Currently, they serve as a “watchdog” by monitoring political developments”, but they also engage with civic and political education and thus launched Resistența TV in order to increase their outreach (Tudorica 2017). The last example is de-clic, a platform known for petitions and online activism that focuses on quick and effective mobilisation infrastructure. It was created by the Cluj-based association Efectul Fluture (Butterfly Effect) – nomen est omen.38

These initiatives exemplify that there are more than direct political consequences and a general awareness for protests after five years of increasing non-institutionalised participation. While the numbers remain relatively low, they nonetheless illustrate change that will be seen in the long-term. This change is “more subtle, but more profound and refers to the creation of a new democratic dynamic” in Romania’s society, according to Stoiciu (2016, 68). These direct and indirect outcomes are more important in the long-term for the development of Romania’s democracy, as they represent “the birth of a veritable civil society” (Margarit 2016a, 57).

3.4 Effects of an Anti-Establishment Party

The importance of parties in representative democracies are without question (Burnell 2004, 5). They “are among the most important institutions ensuring political participation”, articulating group interests and political socialisation (Cabada 2013, 77). This part aims to analyse the effects of the new anti-establishment party in Romania. The year 2016 introduced a welcoming situation for the Romanian electorate, as a new political actor entered the landscape in order to present an alternative on election day and beyond. Usually, new parties have mostly been splitter fractions of traditional ones. The new law on party formation in 2015 also ensured an influx of new parties, but as mentioned, the threshold to run for election was still considerable high.

37 The Facebook group Geeks for Democracy has currently more than 10.000 inscriptions and can be accessed here http://bit.ly/2vOsg0T. The homepage of the project Fiecare vot contează is accessible under https://fiecarevot.ro/. The one from Fondul pentru Democrație here: https://fondulpentrudemocratie.ro/.

38 The Facebook group Resistența currently consists of almost 60.000 members, more here: http://bit.ly/2frvDDW. De-clic can be found on their website (https://www.de-clic.ro/) or on their Facebook page, which has more than 40.000 Likes (http://www.facebook.com/de.clic.ro/?fref=ts).
Chapter 2.8 has shown how the new USR party fits into the anti-establishment reform party characterisation by Hanley and Sikk (2014, 523). It also presents the party as indirectly linked to the protests (e.g. support) and civil society (e.g. through actors). However, the “association of USR with the protests [...] was extremely low”, also due to their own behaviour, as they did not want to be perceived as taking advantage of the protests (Jiglău 2017). Cabada (2013, 77–78) also highlighted the risks of such a “single-issue” party, not only was it lacking an encompassing program to address deep-rooted societal issues, but it further generated instability and unpredictable results.

The following sub-chapters seek to find answers to the following questions by analysing interview responses: Has the new party actually presented an alternative at voting day? (3.4.1); How was the support and impact of USR, particularly in Bucharest, capital and main place of protests? (3.4.2); Which shortcomings and limitations of a single-issue party can be observed? (3.4.3).

### 3.4.1 USR as a Political Alternative

In general, the majority of interviewees saw USR as an alternative option to vote for in 2016 (Grama 2017; Cernea 2017; Bădiță 2017; Tudorica 2017; Volintiru 2017). Laura Ștefănuț (2017) illustrated this by saying: “Up to a length, it presents a new alternative. We have proof that they were voted for and entered parliament, which was not an easy task.” Some also considered the party as a new option while pinpointing their lack of ideological program (Bădescu 2017), their internal issues, (Feșnic 2017) and the fact that the party promoted itself as the only alternative (Petruț 2017). Despite their issues, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, Peca (2017) considers USR as Romania’s best political option.

Nonetheless, not all interview partners saw USR as an alternative party, primarily due to its lack of program (Marian 2017). George Jiglău (2017) described the party as not really being an alternative considering what matters primarily is the main cleavage between PSD and non-PSD voters, which left USR as only a preferable oppositional choice. Once again, the political cleavage, structuring the political system and support (Mair 2006), becomes visible and important (see also Chapter 1.2.2).

These differences very well reflect the situation in 2016, where “mostly young urban progressives as well as other disillusioned liberal voters” (Udrea and Spöri 2017) perceived USR as new alternative in opposition to PSD. Thus people voted for USR, impacting both local and parliamentary elections.

### 3.4.2 Support and Impact of USR

The success and, to a certain extent, the impact of the new party can be noted in its electoral results. For the former president of USR, Nicușor Dan, electoral success required effort and time. It began with his association, was followed by his independent mayor candidacy in 2012, and finished with the establishment of a regular party in 2016. They basically formed “a political movement ‘a la carte’ in Bucharest”, according
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to (Volintiru 2017). This lengthy process exemplifies the considerable electoral and financial support for his party in Bucharest (Teniță 2017). Thus far, the USR has been a success storying, showing people “that it is possible” (Cernea 2017) to enter the rather closed institutional political system in Romania.

Their electoral success was due to the citizenry’s disillusionment with the traditional parties and, as Petruț (2017) noted, the USR’s ability to address “the active citizens, who were protesters or influencers”. The election result for the parliamentary elections was considerably good for a new anti-establishment party that had not existed at a national level four months prior.

The Union to Save Romania received 625,154 votes during the parliamentary elections in December 2016. With 8.86% of votes casted, USR was the third strongest party in parliament, following the Social Democrats (45.47%) and the National Liberals (20.04%). They received 13/136 seats in the Senate and 30/328 in the Deputy Chamber. Figure 6 reflects the USR’s particular strength in the urban, more liberal centres of the country, such as Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Sibiu, Brașov or Timișoara. Data shows that they received an average 11% in key cities (excluding Bucharest), but only 3–4% in villages (Mateescu 2017b). In addition, USR received the most diaspora votes (28.87%), ahead of PNL and the Popular Movement, leaving PSD to rank fourth. Varying diaspora voting behaviour is a result of country-specific information and media usage, according to Bădescu (2017).

Bucharest is unique in the sense that harbours both USR support and non-institutionalised participation. In the parliamentary elections of 2016, the Union to Save Romania won 25.12% in the capital, illustrating a much stronger impact in Bucharest than nationwide.

The impact of the new party on the local elections of June 2016 was even more successful. Nicușor Dan and his USB won 30.52% of votes (PSD 42.97%)—a significant growth from 8.48% as independent candidate in

\[ \text{Figure 6: Distribution of USR voters in parl. elections 2016. Source: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (2016).} \]

Figure 6: Distribution of USR voters in parl. elections 2016. Source: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (2016).
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2012. Thus, the impact of and support for the new party was quite strong and visible in the capital. USB managed to win more than 30% of votes in all Sectors, apart from Sector 5 at “only” 24.39%. In Bucharest, there are visible differences between the city’s centre and outskirts. Sector 5 houses the city’s poorest citizens, implying that economic wellbeing may influence electoral preferences towards PSD (Jiglău 2017). Brett (2016) acknowledged the success of the new party, but also pointed towards the difficulty in sustaining this support for the entire mandate.

Crăciun (2017b) saw the election of USR as a successful protest vote that revealed the weakness of big parties, thus altering Romania’s political landscape. Catalin Teniță (2017) agrees, stating that USR was elected “because people were not satisfied by the other parties, not necessarily because they consider them as a solution”. This suggests that electoral volatility, which has been high in Romania (Tavits 2005, 284–85), still matters and that there is no guarantee that this protest vote for an anti-establishment party will bring long-term party support for USR on a national level.

Several factors can influence the development and long-term support of the party. Florin Feșnic (2017) considers their impact to be “really important”, but also highlights the associated responsibilities and risks: “Unfortunately, it can go both ways. The expectations of so many people were raised so much, that if this fails, it might throw out many people from the electoral process for a long time.” In anticipation for the following chapter, within one year, USR has maintained crucial internal struggles, making a long-term impact by the party unlikely. Party support seems to be stable to some extent only in Bucharest. Nonetheless, things could turn quickly the other way. If the leadership splits, supporters will do the same.

3.4.3 Shortcomings and Limitations of USR

Having discussed the party’s success, this thesis now discusses the issues that have developed only one year into its existence. A vast majority of interviewees and chapter 2.8 have mentioned the intra-party struggles such as a lack of ideology (Marian 2017) and their lack of vision for the country beyond anti-corruption and good governance measures (Teniță 2017). Crăciun (2017b) even suggested that they “replicated a model of a typical social movement, neither left nor right, but with very diverse ideological values”. Briefly put by Feșnic (2017): “Clearly USR is a party that does not know what they stand for”. Again, the issue of the Coalition for Family has been raised before and has also been mentioned as the party’s most divisive issue at the moment. Three interviewees noted that this issue was emphasized by the party’s political competitors as a distraction, causing internal inefficiencies and division (Bădescu 2017; Crăciun 2017b; Tudorica 2017).

This lack of a common ideology or vision is a testament to their “almost randomly” chosen political personal (Jiglău 2017) due to limited time (Grama 2017) – making their anti-establishment characteristic the uniting factor (Marian 2017). While the internal quarrel over the Coalition for Family referendum
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brought these differences to the foreground, after almost one year, many voters seem disappointed and not satisfied (Peca 2017; Teniță 2017; Ștefănuț 2017; Grama 2017). This stems from a well-educated urban electorate in support of the party – a more critical electorate with higher standards (Feșnic 2017). Remus Cernea (2017) further stated that the party has become “another failure”, like many other opposition parties in Romania’s post-communist history.

Catalin Teniță (2017) suggested – to be blunt – that USR lacks two functions: a whip and mediators. This suggests that the party lacks discipline, a claim supported by Ștefănuț and Tudorica (2017), and a common ground for dialogue between the ideological different groups; Or a leader, who would have taken care of these issues. Also lacking is the party’s communication skills, both internal and external (Tudorica 2017; Teniță 2017). These internal struggles together with the lack of clear leadership and a binding vision led interviewees to believe that the party will split or restructure itself (Meuser 2017b; Teniță 2017).

In conclusion, it can be said that this single-issue (anti-corruption/good governance), widespread disappointment with traditional parties, and a disastrous electoral campaign by the National Liberal Party as a key opposition party (Meuser 2017b), resulted in USR success. Nonetheless, their lack of a common vision or ideology became their greatest limitation, as the party’s first political issue beyond their agenda has resulted in turmoil.

The following chapter discusses the election year of 2016 and discusses why increasing non-institutional participation, paired with an anti-establishment party as alternative, did not have much influence on voter turnout. Jiglău (2017) stresses that the non-institutionalised forms of participation are as important as voting, but „people on the streets need to understand that representative democracy is based on parties and elections“. This has also been noted by Rose (1995, 561), who calls for the creation of trustworthy parties in post-communist countries in order to mobilise the demobilised voters.

3.5 Influence on Voter Turnout

The last chapters have shown that (a) Romania has a low turnout in local and parliamentary elections for a number of overlapping reasons, (b) the non-institutionalised participation has increased over the last five years, more noticeably in protest participation and less noticeably for other, more regular activities (e.g. monitoring), and (c) the new anti-establishment party was effective as a voting alternative and thus entered parliament. Now, recapitulating the main research question, this thesis asks to what extent the latter two factors had an influence on institutionalised participation in 2016? Particular interest is given to Bucharest, the capital and main scenery of Romanian politics with the highest protest participation levels.

The direct impact of protests and the polarization of PSD/Anti-PSD cleavage on institutional participation was visible during the presidential elections in 2014. This finding correlates with Kostadinova’s findings (2003, 755) that people in eastern Europe are more likely to vote when “they believe that their vote
matters”. In addition, the Bucharest turnout for presidential elections was also slightly higher in 2014 (65.52% to 64.11% on a national level in the run-off – a first since 2004). This could indicate a link between electoral turnout and non-institutionalised participation forms in a particular setting. But again, these assumptions are pre-emptive and require detailed investigation. There was, in any case, an impact on presidential elections, but to what extent was it influencing parliamentary and local elections – cases that even offered an alternative party?

In June 2016’s local elections, the overall turnout was 48.17% and a staggering 33.23% in Bucharest. This matters because it results in a scenario where ~600,000 voters decided on a local government that would be responsible for almost 1.8 million people and thus only increased the lack of sufficient political representation.

![Figure 7: Local elections turnout: comparison national – Bucharest.](image)

The longitudinal analysis of voter turnout for local elections (Figure 7) shows that turnout has decreased once again (similar to 2008 rates). Whether non-institutionalised participation has an impact on these rates is difficult to determine, but recurring patterns imply potentially stronger factors. There seems to be no positive effect on voter turnout due to increased critical awareness after protests nor due to a new alternative party.

Chapter 1.2 has shown that Romanian politics take place mostly in Bucharest, not only because it is the capital and thus centre of key political institutions, but also because the political system and the main parties are so hierarchical, keeping power within the city. Cosmin Marian (2017) pointed at the successive failures of local administrations (big and diverse city, difficult to manage) as a potential cause for low turnout in the capital. In addition, campaigning for a new party is difficult when non-independent media plays a role (Bădescu 2017). Manipulative and biased reporting of certain candidates is a widespread phenomenon in Romanian electoral campaigns. It can thus be concluded that the effect of protests and a new party seem to have no effect on voter turnout, at this point.
In 2016’s parliamentary elections in 2016 41.61% of Bucharest voted, while in general only 39.79% of the country did so. Figure 8 shows that this was the first time since the end of communism that the turnout in the capital was indeed higher, albeit hardly, than the national level.

Figure 8: Parliamentary elections: comparison national – Bucharest. Data for 1990 in Bucharest not available; Data from elections for Chamber of Deputies.

Whether this is an outlier or a new norm is yet to be known. The underlying causes may be manifold – for instance, the electoral campaign, the context of the year (e.g. a new party) etc. The extent to which these factors influenced the turnout independently is difficult to say.

Party politics and election campaign still affect turnout. This is most visible in PNL’s disastrous campaign (Meuser 2017b), which lost a considerable share of their electorate from 2012. Yet the electoral loss is also difficult to precisely determine, as in 2012 PSD and PNL were allies (Cernea 2017). The question now is whether traditional PNL electorate stayed at home or switched to USR, yet voter transition analysis are not reliable. The opinions of the interviewees differed: Meuser and Marian (2017b) shared the opinion that most of the PNL electorate stayed at home due to the party’s internal and leadership issues. At the same time, some claimed that USR both redirected votes from PNL electorate (or others, like the 4% share of votes from Macovei during the presidential elections in 2014), while managing to win former non-voters (Crăciun 2017b; Jiglău 2017; Cernea 2017).

The notions of Jiglău and Volintiru (2017) state that USR did not essentially convince non-voters. Andreea Petruț (2017), from the opposite edge of the political spectrum, said: “They were viewed like a hope, but for people who go to vote. Because people who did not regularly vote were not really impressed by this political party.” Journalist Ștefânuț (2017) expresses similar perceptions when she states, “I found lots of people who did not vote among protesters. I believe this is their option [...]. I asked them why and they said: ‘Because I did not find an alternative. I don’t trust these guys, they are new, they are interesting, but they did not convince me yet.’” The replies of both Grama and Feșnic (2017) support the claim that the experience with new opposition parties has been rather disappointing and that it takes more than a new party to convince non-voters. Thus, the influence of an anti-establishment party, capturing protest votes, seems to have had no effect on voter turnout in Romania (Volintiru 2017). The context still matters, as a
new party and increasing non-institutionalised activities do not seem to have an influence on voter turnout unless protests occur in the context of elections.

3.6 Conclusion

As a more in depth summary follows in the concluding chapter, it can be noted that some of the main reasons for low institutional participation levels, alongside the commonly known individual aspects of education or age, have been identified. The significant increase of non-institutionalised participation over the past five years was also noted, not only in terms of street protests, which are easier to observe and raise more awareness, but also in more long-term structures. Today more people are active in organisations and networks that engage with election observation, independent media outlets and political monitoring. There is thus more political awareness and societal pressure on politicians than there was five years ago.

On the other hand, the protests only directly impacted voting during the presidential elections in 2014. There is no clear indicator suggesting that this activeness and awareness had an impact on turnout at the local and parliamentary elections in 2016. Furthermore, almost all interviewees noted a lack of influence on voter turnout. Of course, voting behaviour was altered with the new anti-establishment party USB/USR, but turnout did not increase. Non-voters still seem to be the biggest electoral group in Romania’s parliamentary elections. It is worth asking whether Romania is an anomaly in this sense or rather conforms to expectations in the region.

3.6.1 Comparison to Central Eastern and South-Eastern Europe Region

When it comes to low voter turnout and protests, Romania is part of a regional pattern. Several comparative studies have demonstrated that central-eastern and south-eastern European countries differ to western, more “established” democracies. While individual attitudes factors when analysing participation, central eastern Europe’s unique context in comparison to western Europe is worth noting (Barnes 2006). Bernhagen and Marsh (2007, 47–49) illustrate the ways in which both institutionalised and non-institutionalised participation have decreased across central eastern Europe during the 90s. This further hampered the consolidation of democracy in the region (Letki 2004, 675).

There is a rich body of studies on high institutional participation levels followed by demobilisation, which led to a rather low but stable turnout (Kostelka 2014, 947–52). The low levels of self-organisation and authoritarian experience, together with negative associations towards politics and their institutions, were key causal factors for low non-institutionalised participation in the 90s (Barnes 2006, 79). Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker (2009, 484–85) empirically demonstrated that “what is at stake at a given election” is a
much better analytical approach than general disenchantment when analysing turnout in post-communist Europe. This is reflected by the usually higher turnout in presidential elections in Romania.

Furthermore, non-institutionalised participation levels were also lower in the post-communist areas in comparison to established democracies (Vrablikova 2014). This was also pointed out by Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2013, 63), who suggested the existence of “a large and temporally resilient post-communist deficit in civic participation”. Hooghe and Quintelier (2014) identified common causes for this inactive citizenry, such as authoritarian legacy, low-income levels, public perception of corruption, and bad governance. This perception, as noted by Kopecký and Mudde (2003), only holds when using a narrow conception of political or civic participation, as their study on uncivil society showed. Thus, it can be said that Romania, with its decreasing institutional turnout and low non-institutionalised participation levels during the transformation is no special case in the region. Yet it is necessary to point out the differences across countries when moving beyond the comparative approach (Letki 2004, 675).

The recent increase of contentious politics and non-institutionalised participation was also visible across CEE and SEE, as noted by Jacobsson (2015a, 1–6), who also highlighted the importance of the post-communist context. In general, Ekman, Gherghina, and Podolian (2016, 1–2) highlight the increase of visible citizen involvement in CEE and SEE, once the narrow conceptions of participation are expanded. Yet Romania, in comparison to neighbouring countries, was again rather late with the increase of widespread non-institutional participation forms in 2012. Marchenko (2016, 21–23) pointed out that civic engagement was mainly triggered by interest in politics and political decision making in the region, not so much their dissatisfaction and distrust, which is better reflected in non-voting. Volintiru (2017) analysed the underlying causes for people protesting in Romania. Her forthcoming survey analysis claims that in Romania, primarily for the early protest episodes in 2012 and 2013, the “structural causes were much more important than trigger causes”. This suggests that although a triggering event was necessary for people to march the streets, their reasons go beyond the triggering issue and aim to tackle structural issues in Romania.

Burean and Badescu (2014, 390) note that severe economic crisis increases the likelihood of protest participation, as Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Spain have demonstrated. According to Margarit (2016a, 48–52), Romanian protesters were inspired by other movements and protests, like Bulgaria 2013 or Turkey 2012, especially regarding their characteristics of protesting: i.a. non-violent, leaderless or social-media mobilisation. This was particularly visible in 2012 and 2013 when the young, liberal, and rather leftist groups were attempting to lead the protests, before the narrative and protest organisation turned towards the single-issue of corruption.

Kirbiš (2013, 236–37) compared voter turnout, party membership, and protest participation between EU20, the eastern central European countries, and the ex-Yugoslav countries. Data of this survey comes from 2008 and with the usual notion of overestimation when responding to such questions. Nonetheless, when
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used in comparison, Figure 9 provides some indicators; Central eastern European countries are the lowest in all three categories. In addition, Cabada (2013, 77) has shown, although numbers differ in other analysis, that indeed party membership is very low in the region, with Romania’s levels fitting into the general trend. The validity of these numbers requires a current analysis, as the influx of protests has certainly increased across the region since then.

Figure 9: Turnout, party membership and protest participation in comparison. Data: EVS 2008. Source: Kirbiš (2013, 237).

The establishment of protest parties in the region and beyond has not been uncommon (Mesežnikov, Gyárfášová, and Bútorová 2013), however, most research thus far has been on populist right-wing parties. Romania already had a successful populist right-wing party in the 90s (Greater Romania), but these parties play a subordinate role these days. Romania seems a bit late on the “trend” of having a mainstream anti-establishment party in 2016 in comparison. Some in the region are: The National Movement for Stability and Progress in Bulgaria (2001), Res Publica in Estonia (2003), Freedom and Solidarity in Slovakia, (2010) and ANO 2011 in the Czech Republic in 2013 (Hanley and Sikk 2014, 523). In addition, Lëvizja Vetëvendosje in Kosovo (2010) or Most in Croatia (2015) could be named as examples from south eastern Europe. While the context and emerging causes differ from country to country, they share some common characteristics, such as dissatisfaction with politics, low confidence in institutions, frustration over corruption, dissatisfaction with democracy, declining living standards etc. Bútora (2013, 21–22). The performance of anti-establishment parties after entering parliament has been studied, highlighting the difficulty of sustaining such a party in the long term (Bolleyer and Bytzek 2016). Romania’s USR could very well become another example of electoral success, only to fall apart shortly after.

Altogether, Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2013, 64) are optimistic about the slow but steady improvement of civil society in post-communist countries. The influx of protests across the region shows that there is contention against the authoritarian practices and developments, no matter if they are in Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia or Turkey. Romania is no exception here, as there was a steady increase of protest participation over the past five years, with five key episodes. It will be important to monitor whether this increase of contention leads to a strengthening of authoritarian practices, as in other countries, or to an overall improvement of democratic quality and participation levels.
In conclusion, several findings can be noted. The first chapter asked for the specific context. Romania’s democratic transformation was problematic as the political system is quite closed to both political newcomers and citizen participation. Adding to this is a party system that has become more stable, but is still interspersed by fragmentation, party switching MPs etc. Catch-all and cartel parties dominate Romania with overarching clientelistic networks, particularly PSD stands out here. Yet opposition parties have taken up similar practices over the last 27 years. Furthermore, it showed how communist, but also transformation legacies are still shaping Romania’s social and political life. A rigged privatization process led to widespread poverty and an oligarchic system, which in turn is returning favours to political parties, an example of such being media bias. The results are visible in high inequality, an aggressive political discourse, and a polarized political society – it has become a cleavage between PSD and anti-PSD positions. The EU accession process supported establishing a key institution, the anti-corruption agency DNA. Despite its focus on top-tier (political) elite cases, it showed that there finally are functioning institutions in Romania. Both citizens and politicians became more aware. Citizens realized that not everything is tolerated and possible, while politicians, out of fear of prosecution, either entered politics for immunity reasons or attempted policy changes in their favour.

The second chapter looked at dissentful contentious politics in Romania between 2012 and 2017. Five key episodes were presented in more detail, showing how mobilisation and scale-shift processes took place, leading from a few thousand protesters in 2012 to half a million across the country and beyond in 2017. The political consequences were observable; laws and proposed law changes were revoked. Governments and ministers resigned. The key impact on elections was in 2014, when widespread protests against Ponta and in support of diaspora voting led to the election of Iohannis and to an increased turnout. The change of narrative, from a rather leftist, environmental viewpoint (2012, but mostly 2013) to a single-issue – corruption – is worth noting. Both the Colectiv club fire tragedy and the February 2017 protests focused entirely on this subject and were the main reason protestors attended. Another rather indirect result, but still positively effected by protests, is the formation of a new anti-establishment party in 2016. The Union to Save Bucharest/Romania included members from across society: former politicians, members of the technocrat government, civil society and protesters, entrepreneurs etc. They propagated mainstream politics, focusing on anti-corruption and good governance.

It is uncertain whether it was an advantage or a shortcoming to not create a political movement through the street protests. Of course, politics were and still are negatively associated and the formation of a political movement could have turned citizens off. On the other hand, creating a more formal movement could have helped to articulate interests and upkeep pressure on the political class. This resulted in a situation where protests did have their success, but not much changed in the political sphere. It is very
likely that more protests will be needed in the near future in order to uphold the checks and balances from civil society.

The last chapter investigated political participation levels. First, when looking at institutional participation, party membership is extremely low and turnout is considerably low, particularly in the most important elections for parliament. Second, there are multiple and often overlapping reasons for people to not vote, such as a crisis of representation and a rather closed political system, which makes the process of establishing alternative parties very difficult. The (perception of) corruption and a general image of “dirty politics”, together with widespread disappointment and extremely low levels of confidence in parties and institutions, discourages people from participating. Adding to this is a severe socio-economic situation for many, best visible when looking at poverty levels and emigration statistics, both also contribute to less political participation. On the other hand, research has shown that the turnout is not as low as the official data would suggest, as a great part of the diaspora cannot vote in local and parliamentary elections if they are still registered in Romania but not living there. The issue of internal migration and place of residency is different for presidential elections, where people can vote in all voting booths.

While the first two chapters were building the “basis” for this analysis, the third chapter investigated the effects of both increased non-institutionalised participation and a new anti-establishment party on voter turnout in 2016. Understandably, this analysis would need more in-depth qualitative and quantitative methods in order to present results beyond expert positions and arguments. However, their insights allow a first general view on the topic and present good indicators for further research. There should also be more focus on individual and societal changes when discussing increased protests and non-institutionalised participation levels. This empirical research could provide more insight into how individual situations affect participation in both institutional and non-institutional forms (Lamprianou 2013, 38).

The impact of protests on institutionalised participation was primarily visible during the aforementioned presidential run-off in 2014. The new party USB/USR was successful, but continues to face difficulties until the next electoral cycle. It can be said that the protests contributed to the success of and support for the party. Interviewees mentioned this aspect as well, stating that some of their members come from political-civil society, but also that a great deal of their support comes from protestors. Their anti-establishment, good governance, and mainstream agenda certainly helped and, in line with a rather liberal-centre-right-conservative electorate (yes, it is complicated) in Romania’s opposition, this also fit well into the electorate of the Social Democrats’ main challenger, PNL. However, when it comes to influence on voter turnout, the new party had little to no effect. Turnout in local elections has decreased both nationally and in Bucharest, but to a level very similar to 2008, implying that there might have been no effect at all, not even a demobilising one. In the parliamentary elections, there was a slim decrease at the national level and a slight
increase in the capital. Yet it is not possible to determine whether this is a result of Bucharest being the main place of USR support (~25% at parliamentary elections) and contentious politics. A more in-depth study on Bucharest and the effects of USR on voting behaviour would be needed.

A further study on comparing the effects of anti-establishment parties across the region may be fruitful as well. Until now, most research was on their success and failures, and little attention was paid to whether these mainstream anti-establishment parties affected voter turnout. The analysis of right-wing populist parties in eastern Europe and their effect on turnout suggests that they tend to demobilize electorate because they are perceived as too radical, while in western Europe they mostly mobilise educated electorate against them (Immerzeel and Pickup 2015, 358). In Romania, one assumption could be that USR mobilised the more educated electorate, while it demobilised the lower class, which does not feel represented by the young, urban progressives. Romania’s case is insofar interesting for further research, as there was an influx over five years of contentious politics and a new party in 2016. This could be a fruitful case for in-depth studies on the effects of protests and a new party on voter turnout.

To conclude, this thesis suggests that both non-institutionalised participation and the new anti-establishment party had an effect in the political sphere in Romania – just not on voter turnout. The only visible effect was when protests were in combination with elections in 2014.

What does this now mean in terms of democratic quality? Contention in combination with a closed political system can backfire and lead to further authoritarian practices by the governing elite. Yet it can also mean democratic improvement if the new party manages to make an impact and, most importantly, to restore and increase trust in parties and politics. However, there is no guarantee that these single-issue parties have a strong impact on the long-term development of democratic quality in the country. In order to achieve this, it needs more than a party that offers “a new way of doing politics”. It needs new means of citizen’s participation both within the party and within the political system in general. Alexandru, Moraru, and Ercuş (2009, 49) already claimed in 2009 that parties need to represent society and regain legitimacy for voters to return. There will never be the perfect candidate or party, but giving people the option to participate and integrate their ideas could reduce the distrust and disenfranchisement in the long run. Of course, there are limitations of regular political participation – Rucht (2012, 146) highlights time, knowledge, or interest. Nonetheless, the feeling of being not represented by the political class could be diminished.

Romania’s short-term impacts were discussed, particularly regarding the very important fact that a critical mass is pouring into the streets when needed. The long-term improvements, though obviously hard to determine at this point, could prove to be more important. There is a new wave, although still considerably small, of citizens who engage in continuous non-institutionalised forms of political participation beyond
Conclusion

protesting. This involves, for instance, monitoring, election observation, independent media (like Casa Jurnalistului or RISE Project), or workshops on activism and civic/political education. After a decade of mostly failed top-down democratisation attempts in the 90s, this could be the start of a long-needed democratisation process through grassroots initiatives. As one of the interviewees outlined in a short paper, “Romania, but central and eastern Europe in general, needs a ‘second democratic transition’” (Crăciun 2017a, 10). Whether this will be sustained and be successful in the long-term is yet to be seen, but it is certainly an aspect worth following, exploring, and studying.
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Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1) Voter turnout has continuously dropped in Romania. What causes such low institutional participation levels?

1.1) Are there any factors you consider important in particular?
1.2) Are there any differences between countryside and cities?
1.3) Are there any differences between social classes? Does inequality matter?

2) In recent years, many have turned to protests. Which role have protests, social movements and non-institutional participation generally in Romanian politics?

2.1) What initiated these protests?
2.2) Which structures or networks developed?
2.3) What consequences can be observed?

3) Do you see the establishment of a new party (USB/R), representing an anti-corruption/transparency agenda, as a political alternative?

4.1) Does the new party have any effects on the political landscape?

4) In general, non-institutional participation such as protests has increased sharply in Romania and the new party represents a political alternative. However, voter turnout has not increased in 2016. Why are so many people still not participating in regular elections?

5.1) Particularly in Bucharest, where turnout is only 30–40%?
## Appendix

### Interviews

**Andreea Petruț**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“There is a big disappointment by majority of the population with our traditional parties, because every time when I speak with different people […], they say I do not vote because nobody is doing things for me, everybody is corrupt, everybody follows their own interests and nobody wants to represent me.”</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In my case, I am one of those people who don’t vote, even if I consider myself as a good and an active citizen, I don’t vote because I don’t want to give legitimacy to a political system or parties who do not represent me.”</td>
<td>System Representation Options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It is a lack of trust in political parties and politicians.”</td>
<td>Distrust</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In the rural area people are mobilized by tradition, they put a lot of importance on the day of voting.”</td>
<td>Legacy Rural/Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In urban areas people know that voting is not the only instrument and that they have other options.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It depends on the type of discourse and on the election campaign.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pensioners are voting more constantly than other people. […] Young people are not going to vote here.”</td>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Corruption is a big problem in Romania, but it has structural causes and you cannot manage it only by arresting some people.”</td>
<td>Governance</td>
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<td>“In 2012 I was in Cluj-Napoca and my mother called me and said that there protests in Bucharest. […] I was looking at Facebook, if something will happen in Cluj. The first day I was on the streets and then I stayed every night for two weeks and became very involved.”</td>
<td>2012 protest</td>
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<td>“That was the top of the iceberg, people were angry before also, but we didn’t have a culture of protests.”</td>
<td>2012 protest</td>
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<td>“This issue of austerity measures was pushed from the intellectuals and academia, who wanted to give a substance to the protests, because people were heterogeneous.”</td>
<td>2012 protest</td>
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<td>“From that point our new civil society was born, because we were a lot of citizens, who were active on different issues, but there was not a network and we didn’t know each other – then we met in the streets.”</td>
<td>2012 protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Very active in Cluj were the anarchists, who were a network before, engaged with the Roșia Montană case, and then they and other citizens like me started to meet after the protests. They built a network called “Angry Youth” (Tinerii Mânioși).”</td>
<td>Network protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There was a fight for the main narrative, because there was a liberal-right group which tried to push their vision and say that everything is about corruption, and not environmental issue. Like we should not criticize the corporation. And there were us, the leftist and environmentalists, who pushed our message, which was supported by Alburnus Maior, the official [Roșia Montană] campaign.”</td>
<td>2013 protest</td>
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<td>“Colectiv protests were a big chaos and that was the time, when we left-wing, progressives lost the power of the main narrative on the protests.”</td>
<td>2015 protest</td>
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<td>“In that year, media and I think secret services, they have tried to demonize some of the oldest [left-wing] protesters, like Claudiu, Alexandru Alexe or myself. […] They contested us and we lost our credibility on our message.”</td>
<td>2015 protest</td>
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### Appendix

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Yes, that is what they wanted to [an alternative] be and what they</td>
<td>Alternative USR</td>
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<td>promoted to be. And the majority of people of those who were in the</td>
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<td>streets believed in this message.”</td>
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<td>“I know Nicusor Dan, I worked with him – he was a partner of my NGO.</td>
<td>USR</td>
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<td>I admire him for his success on the local level, but I think it is</td>
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<td>not enough to administrate a city. […] He has no vision for the</td>
<td></td>
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<td>country.”</td>
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<td>“They addressed their target, the active citizens who were</td>
<td>Impact USR</td>
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<td>protesters or influencers.”</td>
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<td>“They were viewed like a hope, but for people who go to vote,</td>
<td>Non-voting 2016</td>
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<td>because people who didn’t go voting regularly were not really</td>
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<td>impressed by this political party. […] They didn’t create a</td>
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<td>program or policies for people who don’t vote, to address some of</td>
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<td>the problems of those people.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We need a new emotional way, because you need emotions to convince</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<td>people to go to vote. But I think it is time for a new type of</td>
<td></td>
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<td>emotion, regarding the problems of ordinary people.”</td>
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### Cătălin Teniță

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“One of the explanations (low turnout), especially for Bucharest is,</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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<td>there are a lot of people that are living in Bucharest, but they</td>
<td>Residence</td>
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<td>don’t have Visas for Bucharest. They are staying with renting, and</td>
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<td>rent not allows them to become residents.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“And also you have a lot of people in whole Romania that are</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
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<td>registered on the list, but they are outside, they are in different</td>
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<td>countries. At least 10 %, probably 15 % of the population living</td>
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<td>abroad”</td>
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<td>“And you can find this kind of difference between Presidential</td>
<td>Residence</td>
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<td>elections where everybody can vote everywhere; and the local or</td>
<td></td>
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<td>parliamentary elections where you vote where you are registered.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Electoral laws in Romania are not very pervasive – you have to</td>
<td>System</td>
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<td>get a lot of signatures in order to candidate, something like 1 %</td>
<td>Laws</td>
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<tr>
<td>of the number of votes, that’s something like 200 000 signatures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And that’s very complicated to get 200 000 signatures, because</td>
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<td>why should I sign for you? Of course you can sign for multiple</td>
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<td>candidates People are not very interested in polls or candidates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>And if you don’t get 5 % of the total number of votes, you won’t</td>
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<td>get into parliament or the local council.”</td>
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<td>“In Romania, you have larger parties, which is PSD and PNL, they</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<td>have a very good local machine. They can get votes from that.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The system is not so open as it should be in order to tell people</td>
<td>System</td>
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<td>to candidate”</td>
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<td>“And if you don’t have good candidates, people are not interested</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<td>to vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“We had something like 14 parties and they managed the country as</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<td>government or as a parliament, for the last 25 years. And people</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
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<td>are not satisfied with the results, but they don’t have some other</td>
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<td>opportunities.”</td>
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<td>“The most important differences are not standing between</td>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
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<td>geographical parts of the countries or historical provinces but</td>
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<td>between rural situations and big cities, urban localities. Because</td>
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<td>in rural villages the contact with the mayor or the leaders of the</td>
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<td>local political party is more direct and people are going to vote</td>
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<td>because of these guys. Ok, I vote for you, because I like you –</td>
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<td>and on the other side, in urban localities, you don’t have this</td>
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<td>personal contact with politics and people are voting mostly by what</td>
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<td>they see in.</td>
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media, internet or some other programs. Maybe they decide not to vote, or for the party that is not so corrupt - I think there is a different kind of approach.”

“I think they start to matter in two ways: The politicians are understanding that there is pressure from society. And this pressure is more important for them because the opposition is very weak in Romania, it’s historical, that it’s very weak, especially when the PSD is in power. [...] Big events with hundreds of thousands of people, they have some impact, especially the ones from this year. I think this year they start to have an impact.”

“The fact that people spend some time at Victoria square lets them to see a bigger picture. Like ‘what happens to my money that I pay as taxes, are these guys competent enough to create an educational system, corruption…’. Once people are starting to have this kind of problem on their personal agenda, it maybe starts to change a bit. They say, maybe I should get involved in civic action, maybe I should go for a political career…You have a different kind of rapport with politics. And the results should be seen in the next 4, 10 years.”

“Because my generation, I’m born in 1977, graduated in 2000 and then we tried to make some money. Because our childhood and teenage-period was very poor. Also a lot of parents from my generation, lost their job, because the system in the 90s was absolutely destroyed, it was even worse than in communism. My generation started 1995 to 2005 to make money, to try to get in a good financial situation. With this came the bad part of non-involvement into politics. As a corporate guy or entrepreneur, you didn’t have the time to think about this kind of issues. And in your leisure time you enjoyed your success.”

“At one moment, when people start to have kids, they have a better approach to the educational process, then it’s important to have the whole system working. Because this impacts you a lot. Now protesting: people between 30 and 45. The younger generation doesn’t understand how is the situation, and how big is the impact on their lives.”

“People are understanding more that their lives are impacted in a brutal way by the decisions of politicians. I think this is a structural [informal] cause.”

“The formal cause is the change of law, but this is a pretext from my point of view, it was just sparking the protests.”

“There are a lot of big informal groups on Facebook: Corupția ucide, de-clic. But the core groups are very small. You have a big group, but the inner group is very small.”

“People are starting to invest more resources in terms of time, money into civic things. It’s not totally mainstream in terms of people doing it, but at least people from middle classes are not looking at civic actions like they were looking in the past, like some strange guys having strange hobbies; it’s respected. That’s the most important step, to get social acceptance.”

“For example USR got votes, especially because people were not satisfied by the other parties. Not necessarily because they consider them as a solution, but they are good guys, who went into politics.”

“They have their internal problems at this moment. They are very smart guys, maybe there are 100 guys that are really doing something there. They started to split into 5 fractions (liberals, christian-democrats, kind of green party, kind of whatever - holistical party). There are all kind of denominations. It seems they are not talking to each other, they are not
able at this moment to stay on the same table and find a compromise. And that will be a big problem. Probably they will split.

| “People were voting for them because of anti-corruption” | Agenda USR |
| “Can’t make movement just to get rid of somebody, something, need to have your own vision, your own strategy.” | Non-voting 2016 |
| “They don’t have the same origins. Some of them are from technocrat governments, some of them are from entrepreneurship, some of them are from academia.” | Issue USR ideology |
| “They lack two functions as a party: a whip (to align them) and mediators – all of them are from different factions and nobody wants to find the common ground – and they lack a political leader (Dan is a good guy, but he’s from an NGO. But an NGO works on enthusiasm. A party has a different motivation – it works on power, on money, on prestige, not on enthusiasm. He’s a good guy, but probably not the one to lead a party.” | Issue USR discipline |
| “Impact is too early to say.” | Impact USR |
| “The system in Bucharest is so authoritarian, they can’t do a lot of things. For example, they had to sue in order to get their topics on the discussion list.” | Impact USR |
| “They are not good on communication, cannot get civil society behind them” | Issue USR |
| “They changed a bit, but I’m not sure that people that voted for them are satisfied with them after one year.” | Issue USR disappointment |
| “Anetta Bogdan, maybe 8 years ago, owned an apartment in a nice condominium in the central area. And an Italian bought a parcel of land near the condominium and started to build a high building for flats, and they started with ten levels. Basically this situation took their light, it was very close. So she and her husband decided then to fight and close down this kind of building. Together with another guy, from an NGO Association Save Bucharest, Nicusor Dan. And they won. And she understood that Nicosor wanted to run as mayor and started to help him with networking and communication, basically she went to her clients and asked for money, in 2012, she helped him a lot.” | USR |
| “Nicusor Dan is very stubborn” | USR |
| “The Problem is that they didn’t start with a platform, or vision, they didn’t discuss the larger context or their position, economical position, social position. They started by approaching and getting smart people into the party. But smart people is not enough apparently. Because you can have smart people that are Christian democrats and you can have socialist smart people and you can have libertarian smart people, so they have different kind of opinion. Most of the time I found that not necessarily the smartest people get the best results but people that have a nice chemistry between them and are very concentrated and know what their final goal is.” | Issue USR ideology |
| “They are not people willing to fight, in Romania politics is violent. Not in terms of physical violence, but verbally violent, energy should be in the game – And it requires a level of verbal aggressiveness.” | Impact USR |
| “People who vote right after this situation were absolutely the same as before. Basically those who went to protest where exactly the ones who voted for USR or PNL or whatever. And the other guys that didn’t vote stay the same as well. Maybe they changed a few %, but not drastically.” | Impact USR |
Appendix

Cezara Grama

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<tr>
<td>&quot;I think a lot of people think they don’t have options anymore. You need to understand that in the public opinion and spectrum people have been feeling major disappointments throughout the last 20 years, which has decreased participation in voting as well. Now it is even more pregnant than before, especially in local and parliamentary elections, because people feel they don’t have real options to vote for. I think the spectrum right-left, and the political parties that are available have not kept up with their promises and they have not really offered an alternative. So if you are not voting for who is in power, you don’t really have real alternatives on the other side.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<td>&quot;I think people resonate more with electing a single person, still, than collectively selecting a party to represent you in a group in parliament. It is not just going to be one winner, you have to do a different calculation. I think that is still something people cannot really grasp and not understand the importance of having your vote there. Most people feel that one vote won’t matter, but it does.”</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;You pass the judgement much easier on a single candidate which is either good or bad, agrees with you or not; than on a more impersonal group, a list which is proposed. Most of those people, you have no idea who they are. That is a decision inside the party and you are actually voting for a party, you are not voting for any specific person.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<td>“It is different with mayors and local elections, because we elect mayors directly. But there is still a low turnout.” [...] In a lot of the cities, mayors have been in their position for a very long time.”</td>
<td>System</td>
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<td>“In rural areas there is a smaller degree of transparency, there is a small group of people who know each other, the mayor knows everybody; they are usually very poor, they don’t have a lot of budget. So the pressure put on local people is higher than you would see in cities. And the way campaigns are being held is different. It is door to door, it is promising people different things.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<td>“Voting presence is usually higher in counties which are poorer, in general.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>“For example, Bucharest was one of the cities with the lowest presence at voting, but that is a combination of factors. One of them is the fact that the more educated you are, the more pretentious you become. Because you start fact checking, you start have access to NGOs that have data bases online, information that tells you that this is fake, this is true, this is not feasible – you have different access to information. But also the fact that most of the population which comes here [...], the very well educated workforce is mostly in Bucharest or in big cities. Which means, for example that a lot of people who live here, do not have their residence here. They do not have papers, which brings a limitation to your voting possibility, for example in the national elections you couldn’t vote here. You had to vote at a specific voting section or if you couldn’t do that, you would have to go to your county. Which meant that a lot of people couldn’t.”</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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<td>“For example, people who are older and grew up in communism or a lot of their life was spent during communism, back then voting was mandatory. And just shortly after the 90s, people still had that habit, on voting day you had to fulfil your duty and vote. I think, maybe that is still why you see a lot of the segment of 50, 60 or even older who come and vote. They come out and vote in every elections, because I think for them it is a combination of having the habit and they lived through the 90s, the revolution and”</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
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<td>Statement</td>
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<td>communism and the right to vote, to freely vote, has a different value to them. Whereas we are taking for granted a lot of our rights.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<td>“The participation in protests has increased significantly.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Now the turnout was so big because people feel, for the first time since a really long time, that they have something to lose. I mean there has been a lot of progress in Romania in terms of fighting corruption, in terms of better quality of life, better incomes, opportunities of working and developing; and the fact that you are trying to backslide that, people have the sensation that they have a lot to lose, they can’t stand for this. That’s why there was such a big turnout for something, which is quite technical […].”</td>
<td>Impact protest; Cause protest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I think people have become more aware of the fact that you can actually fight this. For a really long time and it’s still very present, people are saying: ‘What can you do about it? You can’t do anything about it. This is just how it is.’ And I think the past years and the fight against corruption has proven that no, you can actually do something about this and we started doing it and this is the right track to move on.”</td>
<td>Awareness protest; Outcome protest</td>
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<td>“In the past five years there is a lot of civil society being involved in trying to monitor what the government is doing, to talk to people, to explain these things, get people to get involved one way or another. And I think Romanians who have had the chance to go abroad in the past ten years, to live abroad to see what it is like in other countries, which have a strong civil society or who have governments who are more accountable. This is something they started to feel that this is what the new normal should be. It is not normal to actually have a government who abuses or tries to change laws by night.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest; Emigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There is a different standard of normality that come to life in Romania in the past ten years and when you have a government doing something like that, people just no, that is enough, we cannot do this.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“For example there is the movement that is called ‘Resist’. I am not sure how organised they are, but you see a lot of people that are identifying with it as a movement. […] There is also the movement which is called ‘Coruptia ucide’, which are not new, they’ve been around for some time and I think they were the ones who started organising the first Facebook events for the protests, but I am not sure on that. Then there is the example of observing elections. The initial group, which created ‘fiecare vot conteaza’, still exists and they are very actively involved.”</td>
<td>Network protest</td>
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<td>“I think that is one of the consequences of the protests, people started to feel that they need to do more than this [protesting].”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<td>“On the one side, the bright side, people became much more involved in their communities one way or another; becoming part of an organization, creating a civil society organisation, donating, being interested, sharing on their Facebook, talking to their families about this. This is something, which I think in the long term is an incredible gain to have people all of a sudden to be there. But it is a critical moment right now for all this energy and all of this great vibe that has become something constructive. Because there is a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of people feel the need to be more involved, but it is not always easy to do that. […] I think it is a crucial moment for people to understand that they need to think on a longer term.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Political consequence is that it totally delegitimized the government. […] At the moment there is no more trust in the government in any way, which makes it incredibly tiresome for the next years, because you will have to watch every movement that they make.”</td>
<td>Consequence protest</td>
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“Maybe it had made the government a bit more careful, cautious. [...] Maybe publically they are being a bit more cautious, what they say and how they say it.” Impact protest

“I think it polarized people in Romania a lot after this protests. It has definitely become a us vs them, which is not always useful, because there is no way of actually coming to a solution or coming to long-term benefits.” Impact protest

“Yes, people perceive them as an alternative, definitely.” Alternative USR

“It did change in a sense that [USR] it created a third party, which is there and tried hard to push forward their agenda.” Alternative USR

“At the moment they have their own problems, because they are highly divided inside party on some issues. I think they have to be very careful not to become a disappointment, because people get their hopes up and they can get very easily disappointed in terms of politics.” Issue USR disappointment

“Because of the fact that they had a success in local elections, they decided to try and run for national elections. Which I think was quite risky back then, because outside of Bucharest people didn’t even know about them. That’s why they had to bring by their side people, who had the capital to actually attract votes from around the country; which meant people from the local cities, which were well known, good professionals, from local NGOs or something like that. And here in Bucharest even people who had been in the previous, technocratic, government.” Issue USR ideology

“USR is viewed as an alternative if you look at the percentage, especially in Bucharest. But, this is not the first time that people seem like an alternative and then turning out to be a failure one way or another. [...] I think that people get disappointed and again reinforced with the idea that they are all the same and it’s not going change. So although they are perceived as an alternative by the people who voted for them, there are still a lot of sceptics out there, who are not willing to vote. They are pretentious, they want the perfect candidate.” Alternative USR

“People have become very disappointed with this and they do not have trust in political parties. I think that has contributed. The last 27 years, every year has contributed to this disappointment, distancing of people from political parties.” Distrust

“People here [in Bucharest] are even more pretentious, they won’t vote just for anybody. [...] But also because of logistics. There is a lot of people here, who actually do not have residence here. Their residence is back home, in counties like 500km away, which makes it difficult for them to vote. For example this year they gave free public transport [to students] and I think a lot of them did, but I don’t think a lot of them voted.” Bucharest

“People have become very disappointed with this and they do not have trust in political parties. I think that has contributed. The last 27 years, every year has contributed to this disappointment, distancing of people from political parties.” Distrust

“The third aspect would be, especially with the younger population, but maybe not just younger, the lack of democratic education and the importance of voting overall for you as a person, as an individual, as a society. We are trying very hard and it is not just us. There are lot of organisations nowadays who focus necessarily on education in any way, that are trying very hard to find ways to be there with resources or seminars, workshops or summer schools to actually try to teach the young public or to help teachers come up with a better way to explain why this is important. For example, in Romania we have civic education, which is democracy education one way or another, as a subject, but it is only taught in gymnasium in the sixth-seventh, maybe in the eighth grade; so basically when you are 14. Whereas in high school, when you actually turn 18 and somebody should have a discussion with you about what parliament does; how your vote impacts; what’s the algorithm for actually calculating Non-voting 2016 Education
elections and everything else. There is no such discussion, you only have a
discussion with 13 year olds, who care less and probably don’t understand a
word you are telling them.”

Clara Volintiru

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<tr>
<td>“I have looked at rural and urban differences, yet they don’t seem to stand out that much recently. There are differences in terms of income, whether areas where the unemployment is higher have tended to vote for Social Democrats or not. And we have not seen any correlation of it.”</td>
<td>Urban/Rural Economic Inequality</td>
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<td>“What we have seen is in fact a correlation with territorial strongholds or the territorially well developed organisations of the main political parties. Traditionally you would say that the urban electorate tended to be more right-wing oriented, but we don’t really have that ideological divide in Romanian politics.”</td>
<td>Urban/Rural Party Ideology</td>
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<td>“We are seeing a cartel type of party system, where the opposition is not really robust and ambiguous.”</td>
<td>Parties</td>
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<td>“What we have uncovered is that there are structural causes that are much more important than the trigger causes. [...] We have done a very raw survey on protest participants from the previous waves, not the 2017 wave. And the interesting fact, because the protests had very different trigger events [...] is that they all draw on institutional weakness and failures. But we were wondering whether there is an emancipation movement in the sense of being reactive and knowledgeable of the policy decisions or whether it is more of an activist society development. And the fact of the matter was that in this very raw survey we found that the structural causes were much more important than the trigger causes, with the exception of 2015. The majority of protesters who responded to our survey were turning to the streets to militate against the government failures, not necessarily the event per se.”</td>
<td>Protest Causes</td>
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<td>“I think that can allows us to draw a line between the protests, more than the events would allow us to do. And we can draw this line with this type of organisational capacity of the protesters. So very similar to a party if you want. They developed, they managed to acquire a sense of communication logistics and mobilisation capacity. So I think what we have seen in 2017 was not necessarily a more grave situation, but rather a better quality of mobilisation and organisation.”</td>
<td>Network protest Outcome protest Mobilisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There is very feeble and weak connection between the networks. [...] But they really do not have the political movement power of Syriza or Podemos and even in Zagreb I see a stronger movement than here. So nothing much happens in-between the protests.”</td>
<td>Network protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think the quality of democracy is being reinforced to the extent where you actually see mechanisms of accountability, informal, but you see them. Mechanisms of accountability and sanctions. So a sort of informal checks and balances. They are doing the job, the opposition were supposed to do and would have done it in a functional competitive democracy.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<td>“There is a destabilisation. For example, when the protests required the government resignation in 2015, well that was a great risk of destabilisation.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest Impact protest</td>
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<td>“In my mind, the vast majority of the protesters are what could be the foundation, the electoral base, of anti-establishment parties, but we don’t</td>
<td>USR</td>
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really see those either. Some have tried to push through. For example USR tried to be a progressive anti-establishment party, but it was too heterogeneous to support that kind of policy platform and we saw that with the Family Coalition nowadays. And the extreme right parties which tried to push through, didn’t manage to make the parliamentary threshold. So there is a vacuum of representation for the protesters.”

“Yes, it was [an alternative], and that is why it has the third largest scoring in the elections.”

“The strategy we are seeing nowadays is urban parties, single-cited parties. Some have managed to push through in Romania. In Craiova, Târgu Jiu, Iasi and Bucharest.”

“Theyir push for a nation-wide party was an overstretch, it was done very swiftly. It wasn’t that successful, but it couldn’t have been any more successful. So in a sense, they were bound to this limitation. Their MPs are a testimony to that. They don’t really have this representative force of local communities that any of the other coalition parties tend to have. They are rather an urban cosmopolitan party.”

“What they did in Bucharest was actually to create this iterative relationships with Nicușor Dan’s campaigning for ten years now. So it is not an overnight party, he was presence – he had a very active NGO in Bucharest. They were pretty much building a political movement a la carte in Bucharest, but they did not do it anywhere else until last year.”

“I don’t think the party will survive, or the chances are thin.”

“I would say [the effect] was none. Because we don’t really have this penetration of society. Not even a party like USR was not able to tap into new segments of society. Marginally into new segments of the urban electorate, but only marginable.”

“I would hesitate to say, although I haven’t had access to electoral data, but I would hesitate to say that – and this is what everybody else has been saying in the public space – that they have been stealing the electorate of the other right-wing parties, so people who would have voted for PNL or PDL. I think they did bring on some new voters, but it was not a representative sample, so they did not manage to bring an entire electorate to the table.”

“Who did not vote? Well, I think there are many people – we saw that in the debate with the presidential elections with the diaspora, there is a problem with the diaspora, because the scandal with elections in 2014 was solely based on registered members of the diaspora. Whereas in the Romanian electorate, as a European Union member state, you have plenty transiting citizens. They can be for studies, they can be for temporary work or for visiting family, but the important thing is that they are not home for the election day. That creates a lower base, than we are looking at. The 40% might actually be a higher turnout rate, if we would have good demographic data to reference data against.”

“Some of the students or longer-term residents can get a ‘viza de flotant’ – basically a temporary permit. So for example students have a temporary residence in their accommodation area, where they are hosted. So you do have for example in Politehnica in Bucharest there are long ques of students who are voting for their region where they are staying at that moment. So for example, if you are a student from Cluj, you cannot vote for the mayor in Cluj, you are supposed to vote for the mayor in Bucharest, while you are holding a temporary residence in Bucharest. Which further decreases the representative chances of people from other cities, rather than Bucharest,

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<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Anti-establishment</th>
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<td>Issue USR</td>
<td>Alternative USR</td>
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<td>USR</td>
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<td>Impact USR Turnout 2016</td>
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<td>Non-Voting 2016</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
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<td>Residence</td>
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Appendix

because you have the migration patterns. There is a recent study of the World Bank this year, that is called ‘magnet cities’, and what you see is incredible levels of migration within the country. So the majority of the majority of population is concentrated in Bucharest and a couple of more other municipalities, which means that the rest of Romania is represented solely by permanent, static, non-migrant, usually non-active population.”

Claudiu Crăciun

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<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“It might be the case that citizens grew tired of their electoral options that they have. Maybe it is a sort of fatigue with the party system.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<td>“The many scandals [of the parties], corruption, which paint a portrait of parties as being, basically, organisations dedicated to accessing resources, not giving too much attention to the program. [...] I think it is a disappointment and fatigue with the parties.”</td>
<td>Governance Disappointment</td>
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<td>“I think that there is an effect of the size of community. If you go towards the smaller places and small communities, you realise that relations and even kinship start matter more; and for sure you have a larger space for manoeuvre and control by the local authorities, for example the mayors. When you go to the bigger cities, then you have to rely on mass media in order to mobilize.”</td>
<td>Rural/urban</td>
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<td>“I would say that somehow the rural electorate is more predictable to mobilize, whereas in the especially large urban places, you have to control the message through other means. So I think that there are different mobilisation mechanisms at play.”</td>
<td>Rural/urban</td>
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<td>“We know for sure that the poorest of the poor don’t vote. There are some people, who don’t even have IDs, so there is a clear obstacle for them participating. [...] Then, when you reach some above strata you see that they are voting, but only if there is some organisation, which mobilises them actively. I would say that when you go towards the middle class, you get more and more participation. It is difficult to say, if there is a class factor into participation. It might be that there are different stakes for participating or different instruments. But, I would say that the lower classes might be more predictable – we see that in the profile of PSD.”</td>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<td>“I think the lack of legitimacy of parties and their bad image contributed a lot to the protests.”</td>
<td>Cause protest</td>
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<td>“People found protests as alternative means to have a political voice, even though I remember very clearly people saying in 2012 and 2013 that they were pretending that they are not part of the political process. This idea that politics is just related to parties and government and their own actions of contesting a decision or going to the streets as not political.”</td>
<td>Cause protest Apolitical</td>
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<td>“I think there was a gap of participation in general and a gap of social capital. There was a niche left by the parties, which was then occupied somehow by different groups [...]. Interestingly enough, the parties lost the monopoly on the public space and on the public expression of discontent or support – and this is the most important thing.”</td>
<td>Cause protest</td>
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<td>“For example the last protests, the biggest ones, in February this, the sheer size of the protests – we are talking about 250.000 people on the streets, exceeded by far the capacity of all parties and organisations to mobilize. There was a dynamic that escaped the control of any institution.”</td>
<td>2017 protest</td>
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“Not formal [networks developed]. [...] I think there were kind of active groups of people, who stayed friends on a personal level. I think this personal level is very important, because you might get 20-30 people and at some point, they could talk to each other. They could create an event and as individuals, they are credible enough to say, ‘we are going there’.”

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<th>Network protest</th>
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“I would say the first effect [of the protests] was to give a boost to the NGOs. Now they found a new legitimacy, a new space to express themselves and also something to work with.”

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<th>Outcome protest</th>
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“I have a feeling that the energy was not lost somehow. I look on social media and see that most of the people who were active in 2012/2013, they stay active. I mean they sign petitions, join protests.”

| Outcome protest |

“I had been very active for the last 5 years in protest and I think I helped building a protest culture – I think I had a role in that; But also for me personally and for other people that I know, we felt the need that we have to take the struggles further. So we started a left-wing platform.”

| Outcome protest |

“Protests were usually single-issue protests, in a sense that we don’t want a certain decision, government law or opposing a gold mining project in Roşia Montană. The fact that they were single-issue allowed us to gather people with very different ideological perspectives. So it wasn’t uncommon to have at the same protests people who are conservatives, nationalistic deep-party libertarians, left-wingers, environmentalists and so on.”

| Cause protest |

“USR basically replicated a model of a typical social movement, saying that they are neither left nor right, but they accept groups and people with very diverse ideological values. Which was very interesting as a communication tool. It worked, because they kind of fed into this large narrative that was built in civil society. They had a dominant issue of anti-corruption, and still have it. So basically, they said: ‘We are a federation of groups and ideologies, everyone is welcome. We just want transparency and anti-corruption first and foremost.’ They entered the parliament.”

| Impact USR |

“We have a referendum, which is promoted by very conservative, religious groups to define the marriage/family in the constitution as a marriage between a man and a woman. They were working for that for years. [...] This issue came right on the public agenda, brutally, like who is for and who is anti? The big two parties, PSD and PNL, said: ‘Ok, we are going to go with this’. They are afraid of retaliation. Interestingly enough, USR, when they had to decide what to do, they split.”

| Issue USR Cff |

“I gave this example on the difficulty on the long-term a configuration on which you don’t really take seriously people’s different values. You could do it somehow in the civic sphere, going for a single-issue protest – it is fine, we don’t have to like each other. But when you are into politics, this idea of having pluralism at the level of a single organisation, for me as a political scientist, is not comprehensible and not functional in the end.”

| Issue USR ideology |

“Somehow, [the political landscape has changed]. They were a new party; they were successful – also in the sense that they showed the weaknesses of the big parties.”

| Impact USR |

“They [USR] didn’t bring too many people into politics largely. Probably there were people who voted for them and decided to vote [former non-voters], but I think they are marginal, because, basically they took from PNL.”

| Impact USR, Non-Voting 2016 |

“I don’t know what people will convince them [non-voters to vote]. Maybe they need new organisations that present them a real choice. That would be one avenue. Also, it is about how these new choices are shaping up, people

| Non-Voting 2016 |
want successful organisations, so if they don’t manage to assert themselves as being sold and credible, probably they will lose that support.”

“I think there was a protest vote and protest vote is always there. It is not clear for me, what will happen next, if they will keep that vote or not; if they increase their vote or not.”

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<td>“I remember one guy came and said ‘you want to candidate? But you are a kid, I’m pretty sure you don’t even know how to steal’. This is very sad, because people think it is normal to be corrupted, normal to steal.”</td>
<td>Governance</td>
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<td>“You have to educate the electorate, because I met young guys and asked ‘Are you going to vote?’ ‘Ha, are you kidding me.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘We don’t have a voice, our opinion doesn’t matter’.”</td>
<td>System Representation</td>
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<td>“This word party is associated with very nasty stuff in people’s minds.”</td>
<td>System</td>
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<td>“When you lived for 50 years [...] in communism, you couldn’t do anything. You’d have risked too much, the moment you stand up, the next moment you are in jail. It is this learned helplessness. [...] You don’t have the power to change anything and that is what you are learning your kids.”</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
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<td>“I went to protest and I met very few people, seven, eight or nine people. [Together with a friend we created] Umbrela Anticoruptie: [...] It is reactive, we don’t have so much time. [...] It is informal, a small Facebook group, with some 900 people.”</td>
<td>Network protest</td>
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<td>“When I grew up in a repressive system, you know the ‘taste of it’ – you know how it feels.”</td>
<td>Cause protest</td>
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<td>“I don’t have the big picture of what is happening in the party, but I like what they are doing and the fact that they offer transparency.”</td>
<td>USR</td>
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<td>“I don’t like what is happening, but with all this, they are 1000 times better than the others. So even with the internal scandals I feel that they are a much much better choice.”</td>
<td>Issue USR Alternative USR</td>
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<td>“Many people are disappointed by USR and I’m trying to explain my point of view: Look, because they were investing too much and you thought they are flawless, you know perfect. I mean, it is a party that grew up in three months. It was artificially, it was not this organic grow, because they wanted to win the elections. They suddenly spread country level from Bucharest, where it was an organic group for some years, but when they spread to country level, they couldn’t control. So some are okay I guess, some are not. I mean they don’t have the same set of values and stuff.”</td>
<td>Issue USR disappointment</td>
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<td>“The protests in February, how it was in Cluj. Of course, the people from USR were in the streets, because that is why they got involved in politics. One of them was very good on the scene, he was a very good talker – he knew how to talk to the public and he knew how to encourage people to express themselves. He was the perfect moderator for the scene, but then was a problem with the party – why is he there, it is not okay to be there, because he is a member of a political party. The party wanted a low profile during protests and not risk politicizing the protests.”</td>
<td>USR Protest</td>
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## Florin Bădiță

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<tr>
<td>“The communist legacy plays a key role in the situation that people still think the president is like god, that he is more important.”</td>
<td>Legacy</td>
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<td>“I don’t think there is a difference between rural and urban areas; I think it is a big gap.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<td>Dec 2011, Alexander Alexe was organizing Occupy Romania in Bucharest, but police came quickly and put us away, because by law you would need three days before to announce protests.</td>
<td>2011 protest</td>
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<td>In 2012, I made the Facebook event, first for Targa Mures and then I moved it to other places, also to Bucharest.</td>
<td>2012 protest</td>
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<td>2013 was also a media blackout on the protests, therefore the network Uniti Salvam decided to walk through the quarters in Bucharest to raise awareness</td>
<td>2013 protest</td>
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<td>“The question was can protests really help, and Rosia Montan has proven that something can be changed. People became more aware that they can change something.”</td>
<td>2013 protest</td>
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<td>“With the fire in Colectiv I created the Facebook group Corruption skills (Coruptia ucide). This event showed to the people that change in society is needed, because this is dangerous and if we will continue like this, more people will die.”</td>
<td>2015 protest</td>
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<td>“After 2015, people understood that protests is not enough and more people got involved in NGOs, like Funky Citizens.”</td>
<td>Outcome protest Network protest</td>
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<td>“For sure it is an alternative. When you look at other parties and what they did, this was the best option.”</td>
<td>Alternative USR</td>
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<td>“A lot of the people don’t understand the importance of local and national elections.”</td>
<td>Education</td>
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## Florin Feşnic

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<td>“Probably the starting point was higher, I mean the expectations 1989/1990 were that in a couple of years we will be like Germany or Switzerland. Then reality came sooner rather than later.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<td>“Two potential reasons that might drive the rural vote up is that local notables have way more leverage. If a party, typically in rural areas that is PSD, controls the administration, he or she might influence people to show up. [...] In rural areas there are also all these stories of making up voters, like the dead voting in Teleorman. I don’t think that is the case anymore, because now there is this application, which to my knowledge works really well. That is really good, for years Romania was terrible on these electoral lists.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<td>“[Comsa] was arguing that in fact the turnout did not decline as the numbers would indicate. Why is that? Because of migration. It is one thing to live in Cluj. [...] But if you are in Spain or Italy, where there are millions of Romanian citizens, who have the right to vote, and who may have to drive hours to the closest polling stations. If you only look at the eligible voters, the drop is not as significant as it appears to be.”</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
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<td>“Protests had quite an impact in Romania.”</td>
<td>Impact protest</td>
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### Younger Romanians calling their parents from diaspora, saying: okay, if you vote for Ponta, I’m not sending any money home. And I have heard these stories over and over again.

2014 protest

Consequence protest

### “DEMOS is, if it will end up becoming a party, which I think it will at some point, almost like a direct consequence of these protests.”

Consequence protest

### “I think there was for a while a critical mass growing in Romania’s society, it’s just that it were isolated people or maybe small group of friends or even NGOs. The protests was not only the link, which brought them together, but also a kind of proof that we are not as few as we thought we are. There is quite a lot of people who dislike all the parties, so there is really room for a party which would really represent Romanians.”

Outcome protest

### “Clearly by far the youngest and better electorate is clearly the electorate of USR. But this also means that the standards of your voters are much higher and it’s very easy to lose them.”

USR

Issue USR disappointment

### “Clearly USR is a party, which does not know what they stand for.”

Issue USR ideology

### “I think the impact was really important. Unfortunately, it can go both ways. The expectations of so many people were raised so much, that if this fails, it might throw out many people from the electoral process for a long time. So, I think this comes with lots of responsibilities, if they plan to be a different kind of party.”

Impact USR

### “Oh I am pretty sure it was [an alternative]. And it still is to a larger extent, they still have the chance to be a real alternative.”

Alternative USR

### “There are people who vote and there are people who don’t. And it takes not just a new party, it needs a miracle. Moreover, some people don’t engage because they are disappointed and some don’t engage because they don’t have the skills and education. So if they weren’t engaged by the old parties, and this is just a hypothesis, a party like USR or DEMOS will have it much harder.”

Non-voting 2016

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### Gabriel Bădescu

#### Quote

“In the beginning the voter turnout was very high, because people were enthusiastic, but then people became more realistic about the difference between alternatives, first time they voted for A and then for B, and found that things are not so different. (There’s an article dealing with the region showing that the third round of elections in the region, in a lot of countries people voted for extremist and populist parties. And the question was, what happened – did a lot of people become fascist over night? And the explanation suggested, no, they exhausted mainstream alternatives and tried something more exotic.)

“Additional, we changed the dates for presidential elections and parliamentary elections, so that was the big drop. If you play with statistics you can show that the enthusiasm for parliamentary elections was not higher even before, but it was the presidential because it’s associated with a person, with your choice.”

“There is another aspect which I would add to the decline, which is that the decline is less than it seems, it’s also due to migration. So in fact the turnout in Romania is higher than the official one, because the turnout is computed as the number of the people who vote divided by the total number of voters. But first Romania had a problem with electoral list, they corresponded to a total population of 23 million people, which do not exist,
we are less than 20 Mio. That was because they were not able to clean the list, a lot of dead people were still there and also some people that are registered in more than one place if they moved. A demographer did a study that shows that when you see a turnout that is 50 %, in fact it’s more likely 60 %.“

| “On the other side, a lot of people are outside, so although they have the right to vote when they live in Italy, Spain and Germany, the turnout outside the country is much less, because the effort to go to vote is much higher.” | Emigration |
| “There are no systematic differences regarding voting in rural/urban. They used to be, we had a clear cleavage between rural and urban population, which in Romania is a significant, as half of the population lives in rural areas, but when you follow the elections and look to determinants of turnout and also voting preferences, this divide became less and less important.” | Rural/urban |
| “The important divide we have is between people from inside the country and outside, in terms of voting preferences, which is interesting. I think it’s due to a very large extent to the type of information people receive. Those from outside search on internet so they have access to the information on internet about political parties and candidates whereas people in the country, some of them watch TV, where the type of message is different. Of course it could also be that people that migrate are different than those who stay, but when you see that voting preference is very constant across very different countries such as Canada and Italy and Spain, where the migrants are very different in terms of education and wealth, but their voting preference is very similar across this countries.” | Emigration Media |
| “Sometimes we see an important difference [in social classes], especially in the last elections, where we had a new party, USR. USR’s voters were quite different to the others, they belonged to middle class, younger, richer, more educated. But otherwise the difference between the two main parties, PNL and PSD tended to be less and less in terms of this kind of determinants.” | Socio-economic status |
| “Over the last 5 years Romanians started to be more and more active, but as I know data from other countries this is a world tendency, probably associated with Facebook and social networks.” | Protest Cause protest Mobilization |
| “Probably the most interesting aspect was the election of the current president. We had two rounds, in the first round it was almost certain that the current prime minister, Ponta is going to win because he won the first round with a big difference compared to the second one. But in the space of 2 weeks people in large cities protested and that helped to create an image of the need to get rid of that guy. So Iohannis was able to capitalize that.” | 2014 protest |
| “People didn’t change their mind in terms of Ponta vs Iohannis, but a lot of people changed their mind in terms of voting or not. Because if you look to the counties of the country, you can see that the turnout where people liked Ponta declined between the two rounds, whereas the counties, especially the ones in Transylvania, including Cluj, where people liked Iohannis, increased a lot. So the differential turnout was the main explanation. I think most of the Ponta voters stayed at home, in the space of two weeks people are not changing their views. It was about mobilisation, and the main message was that Ponta is doing some illegal stuff, he is trying to prevent Romanians from outside the borders to vote – which is true to some extent, but not with very significant fact, but this idea of fraud elections is very powerful.” | 2014 protest |
| „There are some initiatives of the people who protested who try to find other mechanism to be active and have a voice in politics besides voting and | Outcome protest |
Appendix

protest, such as organizing groups which are monitoring parties. One example is, there are some online platforms where people participate, ex-protesters, and try to extract some conclusions like which type of policies should be promoted.”

| Impact protest |
| “There is also a dark side of protests, which is that kind of a message about winners vs. losers in society got more visibility - since the protesters are young, educated, active, good jobs, middle-class – they, or some of the message is, they scapegoated the people who are not active, who are on the welfare, it was a scapegoating in terms of category - wealth, but also the region, because some of the counties are among the poorest, and the county where the leader from PSD is from, is the poorest in the county, Teleorman.” |

| Consequences protest |
| “There’s also a risk that some of the voices which are non-democratic will become more visible. Like Coalition for Family, which represents a good part of the society. They promote very conservative cultural values, and they didn’t have a voice in the past. So suddenly those people have a voice, and at some point they make it represent by a party or maybe not and the mainstream party has already adopted some of their messages.” |

| Church |
| “The orthodox church is very powerful in mobilizing people, so parties do their best to please the orthodox church. We don’t have any serious debate among parties questioning the link between state and the church because all the parties, maybe with the exception of USR, are trying to get support from the church or at least to not be alienate the church who could say “vote anyone expect for not these guys.” |

| Alternative USR |
| “The expectations of many people were high regarding this party, but other people, including myself, where less optimistic because the lack of ideology was a problem. Some of them are successful professionals with very limited knowledge about politics and even interest.” |

| Issue USR ideology |
| “A challenge is that they are so diverse in terms of ideology. Some of them are libertarian, which is very common in Romania among successful professionals, whereas the others are very close to the left.” |

| Issue USR CfF |
| “They were not able to promote their own agenda. They were forced by their competitors to split on the family referendum, so this was a trap, which they could not avoid. They don’t seem particularly skilled as a group, which is not surprising.” |

| USR |
| “There is a recent book dealing with how neoliberal ideas were incorporated in various societies over the last 20 years, and Romania is one of them. It shows how think tanks in Romania were very effective on promoting sometimes a libertarian agenda. And you will see there are names who are key persons in USR right now. And it’s possible that those people will eventually lead the USR. So not the leftist people from Cluj, not Nicusor Dan, but the think-tank type of person who knows about governance - which is good.” |

| USR |
| “Some of the key people in USR are suspected to have some ties to secret service.” |

| Resources Media |
| “The largest part of the answer is linked to resources and media. During the elections, some people close to USR expected much better results, maybe 10 %, but other people, including myself, were pleasantly surprised by the result, given the very little visibility they succeeded to have during the elections. The mainstream-media didn’t give a voice to USR and to smaller independent parties. We have a problem of media-independence, it tends to cooperate with the mainstream-actors. USR was surprisingly weak in |
using the new media, the social networks to get a voice. That was a surprise for me, so I think that was the main explanation. It happened in the past, Nicusor Dan would have easily win the mayorship of Bucharest in case that he were invited to TV-shows and so on. But if I’m representing PNL and I am the mayor, this is my first priority to make sure that any of the candidates with chances are kept in low visibility.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>System Turnout</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Apparently the mainstream parties find out that low turnout is in their advantage.”</td>
<td>Non-voting 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>“When you analyse the party platforms, you see very little differentiation on them. Very often it is very artificial, because the parties are really reluctant to place themselves, to give different voices on a lot of issues, which in other countries exist, such as environmental issues, gender inequality, even this homosexual marriage, the size of the state and so on. That’s another explanation, that there is so little difference between them.”</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think in Bucharest the mass media was part of the problem, because during the last local elections in Bucharest the question was how it is possible that the place with the educated and rich people of the country would vote some crazy, stupid, corrupt guy. Those who volunteered in favour for Nicusor Dan found out that very few people knew about Dan, so these networks were not able to disseminate their message. Maybe in the future it will be different, because the access to Facebook is growing in Romania, now its pretty more than half of the entire population has access to Facebook, so there are new possibilities. But for the last elections this didn’t penetrate a lot. In fact it was quite a surprise what happened in the presidential elections, that was the message for the parties that they could try to mobilize people via FB, so that’s why I was surprised that USR was no more efficient in promoting itself in the last elections.”</td>
<td>Non-voting 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>“As I know, there’s a possibility to vote even if you are not registered there. Some people are suspicious about those so called special list. In each polling station you have the list about people registered there, but you are allowed to vote there if you go with your ID. You could vote for sure if you show on your ID that you moved there, even if you moved recently, but maybe if your official residence is in a different town, than there is only a special place such as the train station.”</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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George Jiglău

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<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“People don’t really understand the fact that parliaments are much more important than president. But, the simple fact that you have to vote for party lists instead of actual people, that is what causes the low turnout. Maybe I am simplifying it, but I think that is the essence here, because regardless of what else is on the agenda, context or issues, we know that the level of trust in parties is extremely low everywhere in democracies; Romania has the lowest in Europe […]. And it is the same with parliament.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<td>“Parties don’t deliver actual results; this is what causes this lack of trust […]. When you have to go vote, this is what voters have in mind: ‘What exactly am I voting for? Do I have to vote parties and they are all the same; you have to vote for a parliament, but we dislike the parliament – they are doing bad laws’. In Romania, there is the thing with sleeping in the parliament […]. That is a big issue, because we live in representative democracies, we don’t know any other kind of democracies and we cannot have representative</td>
<td>Distrust</td>
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democracy without parliaments and parties. You can have representative democracy without directly elected presidents, but not without parties and parliaments. I think that is the key problem for this very low trust in the main pillars of representative democracy.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Voting</th>
<th>Party list</th>
<th>Parties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“When it comes to presidents and local elections however, people vote more […]. This idea of voting for a single person, this is what raises the level of turnout and this is extremely visible when it comes to presidential elections in Romania.”</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Why PSD always getting so much in parliamentary elections, like it did now, but always loses the presidential elections? Because whatever turnout is above 40% goes against PSD. When it comes to presidential elections, people perceive a higher stake, [...] it is even bigger in the second round, because it is a different kind of election basically, where you have to choose between one of them and it’s easier to like or dislike someone. [...] Again, when the turnout is low, PSD has a very disciplined electorate, that always goes vote, around 3-3.5 million people – they will always be there and they are constant. If the alternative to PSD is not good enough, and when it comes to parliamentary elections – it is really not good enough. That’s why people don’t go vote and then the share for PSD is much more visible and impact is higher. When the turnout is higher […] that always goes against PSD.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>Party list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“When it comes to parties, many party lists, many people on the party lists and you dislike them anyways, so that is why people don’t go vote and that is extremely visible in Romania.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>Party list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The alternatives, the political offer is not that good, simply put.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td>Party list</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that they always vote [PSD voters], and that was an issue with the protests. There were slogans that were not targeting PSD as a party, but the voters. Don’t blame the voters, they are your parents. The fact that they vote, that they care about politics, that they get informed, even if it is only about PSD opinions – that is part of democracy and they are good citizens, good voters. They are better citizens in that sense than those who don’t vote because ‘I hate PSD, but I don’t like anyone else, so I am not going to vote.”</td>
<td>Party list</td>
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<td>“There is still a difference, but […] the difference is starting to be smaller and smaller in electoral behaviour between rural and big urban areas.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that people over a certain age tend to vote PSD, more and more regardless of the place they stay. It is still a matter of education indeed.”</td>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<td>“That is a key issue here, because you cannot force parties, they have the freedom to organise themselves internally how they please. […] I saw the youth organisations; you have good people in all parties […]. I know the energy is there, but there is a certain level at parties you cannot push through and what happens to the basis – they don’t care anymore […]. The issue here is the mechanism of recruiting the elite within the parties and the problem is you cannot enforce that through any law. […] There need to be pressure on the parties. For that, we need competition. […] You can build pressure from the outside and from the inside […]; From the outside of a party, more competition would mean more parties – that is partly resolved by the new law in 2015 […], we switched from the most restrictive party law, 25.000, to the more permissive one, 3 people. Yet the number of signatures you need to stand in elections is quite high, so it is very difficult for small parties. In terms of campaign financing, you can get your money back from the state, only if you get 3% […].”</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>Laws</td>
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From the inside, the closed party list is the problem, because it is up to the elite to decide. We advocate for the open party list, [...] that would allow the voter to cast one preference. [...] You would get rid of the idea that you have no one to vote for. [...] That is the way to build competition from the inside.”

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Outcome protest</th>
<th>Awareness protest</th>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that people go out on the streets and they have a reaction whenever the government or the ruling elite does a bad thing is by all means a good thing.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conclusion protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“All the protests that we had, had a short-term impact. They were all, let’s say victorious.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome protest Impact Protests</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The long term impact is not there, [...] because the fact that you have to protest each year is a bad sign, it means that on the long run nothing changes fundamentally. Okay, you have some short-term win, then politicians go back doing whatever they do best, until the next bad thing happens and you protest again.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome protest Impact protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The people who are on the streets, that is a good thing, but again, they need to understand that representative democracy is based on parties, parliaments, elections.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017 protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think the most important effect was this reinforcement of pro-European values.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The fact that you have so many people that are being loud and standing up for the same issue – that matters quite a lot in society, but otherwise, again, in the long-run I doubt that there is an impact.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consequence protest Impact protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If a new party raises or some political movement is formed based on this energy and that political movement actually manages to gain enough endorsement, I would count that as an impact of the protests.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact USR Non-voting 2016</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I wouldn’t overlap them completely, USR took a lot of votes from PNL, that was why they were so bad. [...] USR didn’t bring out people from their homes to vote, not substantially in any case. It didn’t convince any PSD voter to change their mind.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>USR 2016 Protests</td>
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<tr>
<td>„USR started as an idea, it started after Colectiv. We had Nicusor Dan in Bucharest, he was already very active and visible. His own party, which he formed under the new law, so he built on this kind of energy, taking advantage of the new legislative context, that allowed him to form a party a bit easier. But even now, the association of USR with the protests we had in winter, was extremely low. They avoided that because they didn’t want people to think that they want to take advantage somehow – that they are high jacking the protests. Maybe that was a good thing. But their discourse during the protests was basically irrelevant. They did some stuff in the parliament, but their strength as a party is extremely low. So again, I wouldn’t count them, although many do, as being built on a change in society or how people regard politics.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative USR</td>
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<tr>
<td>“No [USR was not really an alternative]. The political landscape is divided in PSD and non-PSD, so that’s the main cleavage that we have in Romania. [...] You either like or dislike PSD, it is not left-right.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The thing is that what is on the other side of PSD, is extremely crowded, you have many parties there. Whatever new party comes up, if it is a left-wing party, PSD will kill it in a second. [...] You have an educated left-wing in the city, it is there, but they are not enough to build a kind of electoral strength to push a party above the threshold [...]”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issue USR ideology</td>
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| “USR was a party that was formed quite quickly [...]. Basically, you had 4 months in order to form the party, have candidates in all the counties, send a list to the electoral birou and also have time to organise for the electoral
campaign somehow during the summer. It was extremely difficult, he [Dan] was all over the country in those weeks, he was looking for people almost randomly by recommendation. He went for this idea of new people, who were not in parties ever before, who had some sort of CV, but that was building a party inside the bubble. It was more or less the same kind of people that would gather and have some sort of interest and willingness to get involved in a party. [...] At some point around September 2016 they were forced, and that is the paradox and big drama, they have to become politicians although they made an image of themselves of not being politicians. [...] At that point I said, if they keep saying that they are not politicians, they will have a problem.”

“USR brought some expertise into politics, [...] that was a good thing.”

“You have the centre and the periphery [in Bucharest]. Okay, Bucharest is big, many are concentrated in the periphery and some of them are quite poor. PSD is doing better and better, they couldn’t touch Bucharest for a long time – until 2008 I think [...]. So even Bucharest changed a lot, but that’s part of the explanation, it is very polarized – maybe in that sense it is pretty much like a small Romania [...]. 2016, in the local elections you had the lady from PSD [Gabriela Firea], who is now mayor, and the main interest for PSD was for people not to vote. She, not that she did it on purpose, but she did such a bad job that actually made people care even less.”

“In the local elections you can only vote, where you live. In the national elections you can vote anywhere in the constituency, meaning the county or anywhere in Bucharest. So that is not a big issue. In the presidential elections you can vote anywhere. That keeps changing, so sometimes it’s confusing and people don’t really know, okay if I am not at home that day, can I vote or not, but if you want to find this piece of information, you can find it. [...] But that is not a big issue in Romania, it used to be, not anymore. In 2016, students could travel for free at home, also in 2014, to go home vote, by train. So there are ways, I would not put that as a big issue in terms of procedure or registration.”

Laura Ștefănuț

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I believe it’s the lack of options.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>“When we had presidential elections, everybody was talking about it. People were voting in bigger numbers than in other elections – and afterwards it was just silent. I mean, people were not interested in local elections, in elections of their mayor, things much closer to them and affected them more.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I believe it is a lack of understanding of how a democracy works.”</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There are the traditional voters of some parties and they are like an army of voters”. “The Social democrats did have the best turnout in this matter – they have a very good system. Even inside the party, they are very disciplined, they are listening to their leader. There is the party line, which goes from top to bottom.”</td>
<td>System Representation</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The systemic issue, which keeps the people in this system, is not addressed. It is not only the Social democrats, also the other parties have not changed the systemic issues. It keeps bringing politicians which are not solving the issue and corruption is perpetrated.”</td>
<td>Party – PSD Governance</td>
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“And there are more and more people who do not find themselves represented by the candidates – so they choose not to vote.”

<table>
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<th>System Representation</th>
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<td>Education Voting</td>
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“And there are the ones who do not fully understand how important the vote is because our education is very messed up – its very passive. We have no civic education.”

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<th>Rural/Urban</th>
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“There is definitely a difference between rural areas and cities. The outcomes are different, if you look at the parties which come out. The countryside seems to be immensely manipulated by the local authorities. It is a fertile land for manipulation. There are very poor people who can be bought easily. And I can understand them, it’s not judging them. I can understand why they are voting as they are and why they are easy to manipulate.”

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<th>Education</th>
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“People have a lack of understanding of how institutions work.”

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<th>Socio-economic status</th>
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<tr>
<td>Inequality Governance</td>
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“So the systemic problems are still there, and the motifs are economical and regarding the education. I believe that until you find some solutions here and try to diminish the gap between the very rich and the huge part of poor people. I saw some statistics, only 5% of the Romanians which have salaries with contract (the ones working illegal you can’t calculate, -just the ones calculating) – it was in 2016, only 5% of the Romanians had a salary bigger than 4000 Lei, which means 900 Euros. Only 5%. 40% of the population was having salaries below the estimated living wage (or even more, I have to check that). And the minimum salary in Romania is far from the estimated living wage, we do not calculate ourselves, but there were some institutions... so it was three to four times smaller, now it is growing, but it’s underneath. We are a very very poor country, we have issues, starting from the social problems, the inequalities.”

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<th>2012 protest</th>
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“I think it’s a lack of understanding how a democracy works. But this was up to 2012, when we started having protests, it was this ‘civic awakening’.”

| 2013 protest |

“It was like, we were very optimistic then, because we had this people who were not willing to accept politicians lying in their faces – which did not happen so far, as I told you. We had an electoral democracy. Meanwhile when we didn’t have presidential elections it was silent, - minor scandals, but without consequences, So everybody thought, they could lie, steal; then came the DNA.”

| 2017 protest |

“People were really angry, I mean I was there, and I never saw people so angry, they were like shouting, before arriving at the government in Victoria Square, on the streets, they were walking, swearing and then running. Some thousands of people were on the streets and then more and more. Because it was insane the way they were managing. They [politicians] really did not learn anything from before, what people want is not very important for them, they want to implement their agenda.”

| Politics |

“Now it’s even worse, with the election of Trump, they think that they can say and do anything. It has become worse, because it gives a leverage. The Romanian politician feels now more entitled to discriminate, to turn against categories of people, they feel more powerful, it’s obvious that they feel more powerful.”

| Network protest |

“Theyir particularity is that they did not have any leaders. So there were from the beginning till the end they were launched on Facebook. And there is a group, corruption ucide, (there are several, but this is the biggest), where you can find information, - we are going there, we are doing this... - and there are some folks who are handling this group, but they do not show themselves, and people are not regarding them as leaders.”
“And this is an issue, because Romania has this trauma of communism and authoritarian leader, so we tend to, each time that someone wants to become a leader, we cut him off. But this is not very good, because it’s difficult to have efficient outcomes without having some leaders. So this is kind of nice, being more anarchy, but at the same time it doesn’t seem very efficient. And each time someone stood a bit up and tried to become a leader, and had a bit of attitude and means to do it, they were instantly pushed town, no, we don’t want this.”

“Mostly what happened is Prime Minister and their Cabinets resigned. But it is an ongoing fight, because I see them being very persistent, they just try to push as much as they can, each time. So the systemic problems are still there, and the motifs are economical and regarding the education. I believe that until you find some solutions here and try to diminish the gap between the very rich and the huge part of poor people.”

“There is definitely a social group becoming more and more aware and of course even the fact that protests followed, that it was not a unique incident, shows that these people have this discipline. And when you were talking to them – the fact that they were coming back, they were having their life, they were going to work, taking care of their children, but they get back in the square almost every evening, if not, every week then, so they were making an effort, because they believed it was necessary to send a message.”

“You cannot calculate for sure, even if you have people who are more and more educated and have a civic behaviour, it’s not a guarantee that the leaders will be mirroring this, it can be on the opposite.”

“Up to a length it presents a new alternative we have the proof, they were voted and entered parliament, which was not something easy. It’s very difficult in Romania for a new party to form – you have to have these limits, they are very high.”

“They built all the electoral system in order to help the traditional parties and not to help any new parties to get to power – this is a very bad model, doesn’t allow pluralism at all, it’s horrible.”

“These guys [USB/USR] managed, although the system is very difficult. This means they had a big critical mass and this shows that people found them as an alternative.”

“The problem with them is that it’s not a disciplined party, it has many voices and it’s already been into scandals. For example there was this big issue, did not have a stand on a matter that interested many people, the Coalition for Family [...], so they could not have a common agenda on this.”

“[Dan] is the leader of the party, he is the one who built the party. This guy did great things and fought for Bucharest. I could not find anything on him – I searched, but I couldn’t find, this guy is really clean.”

“I believe if there was an election again tomorrow, they [USR] won’t enter parliament.”

“But in time they have chances to become an alternative, because they are doing things okay. So they can overcome these issues, I believe so; or they
will be destroyed by them – but I don’t think so. They have chances of becoming a true alternative.”

“Even the people protesting – I found lots of people who did not vote among protesters. I believe, this is their option – they say, ‘ok, I do not vote’. I asked them why, and they said, ‘because I did not find an alternative, I don’t trust these guys, they are new, there are interesting, but they did not convince me yet’. And this is totally ok from my point of view. They are deciding not to vote but they are using other instruments. This is a manner of doing things until they are convinced that they truly have an alternative.”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“When parliamentary elections very coupled with presidential ones, the turnout was also higher for the parliamentary elections. Splitting it had a negative impact on the general voting turnout.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In Bucharest turnout maybe is lower because of successive administrations in Bucharest failed on the promises they made. It’s a big city and not easy to be managed. Being a mayor is a tough job there.”</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Countryside usually has a higher turnout, it’s easier to mobilize people. They are usually mobilized through religious networks, the priests and through kinship networks.”</td>
<td>Rural/urban</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The impact of protests is close to nothing, because most of the people that participated had little idea about what was going on, so they were mobilized, but were not connected to real political life, and they had no knowledge of the political processes they were protesting against; and because there is no follow-up – so there’s one big protest that’s not followed by sustained pressure from NGOs or opposition political parties, so the effects are quite low.”</td>
<td>Impact protest</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They were not a party, more like a gathering of protest individuals, very dissimilar, very different views, ranging from far right to far left, all disappointed with the establishment of the old parties, but they were not ideologically connected.”</td>
<td>Issue USR ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Discontent brought them together, but they had no real political program, they had no idea what to do after being elected in the parliament, they have done nothing except for fighting each other.”</td>
<td>Agenda USR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“No alternative, because they had no real economic program, no real social program, no real program. They were just protesting against something, but if you asked them, what’s your solution for the economy, they had none.”</td>
<td>Alternative USR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Protest politics in Romania somehow – in the months before the elections - has been captured by the Social Democrats usually. Some parts of the Social Democrats leadership – not all of them, they split roles – were more populist. During the electoral campaign they managed to capture the protest votes. My guess is that they have captured consistently about the same proportion of the protest votes, and new votes were not able to be captured by the older parties because of this strategy of the Social Democrats. So basically they were able to control the electorate that they traditionally have, and if necessary, some of the leadership turns more populist to make sure that they can gain as much of the protest votes. So there’s not much left for real protest voters. And this is consistent, so you can see it again and again in electoral campaigns. This is why we don’t have</td>
<td>Voting 2016</td>
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a strong right wing populist party, because the Social Democrats capture all the protest votes in the months before the elections.”

“I believe that some of the liberal electorate was passive, because there was an internal liberal leadership fighting. The old leaders were prosecuted for corruption, and the leadership in the period before the elections was weak and they were not consistent with the values of the party before. They were discussing what Liberals should do instead of knowing what they should do. So the liberal electorate was passive because they didn’t see that clear.”

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<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“People are just not interested, they are kind of lost. This is a signal. If I would be a politician in this moment, or not a politician, but a well-intended politician, I would be questioning my activity.”</td>
<td>Voting</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Because this is a very strong signal, that people do not trust the political class anymore”</td>
<td>Distrust</td>
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<td>“And everybody says, it doesn’t matter whom we vote, anyway, they will do the same things because this is was happened till now.”</td>
<td>System Representation</td>
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<td>“I think that’s also a problem with the younger generations that are not interested at all in what is happening with their country.”</td>
<td>Youth</td>
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<td>“As a society, we are waiting for prince Charming to come. And prince Charming will come and safe us, we don’t have to do anything, he will just come and do everything for us. And this shows me that we have very big problems in terms of political education, economical education and civic education in Romania. So for us, in order to change this, these are the areas that we need to tackle. If you go in the street and ask some random 10 people, who is the most political power in the state, everybody will say, the president – which is completely wrong.”</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>“If we manage to go and teach young kids, students and high school students, that the parliament is much more important than president, maybe then we have a chance.”</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In the rural area, it’s PSD that is ruling everything. They have a capacity of taking people out from their houses and go voting. When you look at the small village where you have a PSD-mayor, every business is somehow controlled by him. People are afraid not to vote, not to go to vote. And if they vote, they will vote with this one, because this one is the one that gives jobs, he has that company or his son has that company. The mayor acts like a small aristocrat, small baron, so people will go voting.”</td>
<td>Rural/Urban</td>
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<td>“For me it was a big surprise last year to see that whole Bucharest voted at local elections with PSD. That was absolutely a shock.”</td>
<td>Bucharest</td>
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<td>“Usually people with less education probably would vote with PSD. I would say that the ones with higher education level would not vote. High-education people are usually right-side of the political spectrum and they don’t have an option, so they will probably stay at home.”</td>
<td>Socio-economic status</td>
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<tr>
<td>“There were two major groups that were formed in the beginning of February 2017. There was my group that’s called ‘600 000 for Romania’, that was the maximum number of protesters that went out. And there was another group made by a Romanian influencer, a highly trained ultra-marathonist, Andrei Rosu, and his group was called Resistenta. Slowly we managed to contact each other. I asked him what was his plan, and he didn’t”</td>
<td>Network protest</td>
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have any plan, the same way I didn’t have any plan. This was all on Facebook first. The reason that I did my group was I being recently returned to the country I didn’t have friends in Bucharest. So when I went to the protests, I looked into my phone and thought, whom do I call to come with me – nobody. So I just do a Facebook-group so I can let people know I’m going to the protests. And from a joke like this I ended up with 15 000 people on the group. And Andrei’s group was made – he was the one all the time in the market at the Piata Victoriei protesting, he moved his office there, and he just wanted to be sure that he can schedule people there when he was going to vacation. So we had Resistenta with 40 000 people and my group with 17 000 people, we had two big groups, the biggest ones, that were made basically from completely different reasons. And then we met, we just joined the groups.”

“Then we did “Resistenta TV” which is an online TV station that we plan to extent.”

“Now we are organized quite good, we have a management team, board of advisers, task forces, small departments. We have a company-like structure, under the name Resistenta.”

“At this moment, we are monitoring, we act like a watchdog, basically we arrived to the point where we are able to find people giving us information before they go to the press. And I think through the way we communicated with people, now we established the level of confidence with them. Even when the press releases news, there are people waiting to see what’s our opinion on it – do we think it’s good, do we think it’s bad – this was an objective that we had from the beginning. [...] We are now designing other projects. One project that we are working now goes towards showing people that politics can be cool and voting is sexy, this is the main idea that we want to pass, and it’s addressed to people in age range 16-23.”

“We are not going into an NGO ourselves, because that will be entering the system, and probably if we do that with our name, we will have controls every day, we will spend every day justifying our actions and that’s not good.”

Resistenta should become a platform that just helps people do this step from civic to politic, but not as a complete unknown person.

“In 2016 I’ve seen them as an alternative, I voted with them.”

“At this moment I’m waiting for them to finish their storming phase because they have a lot of misunderstandings inside them. We have a very good communication with them at this moment at an institutional level. But we cannot influence them in any way.”

“I think USR can be an option for next parliamentary elections, and for the locals, maybe for the locals not so much, just in the urban centers. And for me it’s not very important to see that they will position themselves as a liberal, or right or left or center, but it’s more important for them to have a good communication-system and to stop arguing inside them, [...], and to get better in discipline.”

“In their case it was a tension artificially created through Coalition for Family by PSD. I think PSD just brought it from under the blanket, like ‘here it is, dock on this one’ That was planned.”

“We have bigger problems at the moment, let’s tackle first corruption, education and health.”

“I think that was their main problem that they grew so fast and they were not prepared to grow that fast. They had very bad management and leadership. Dan did a great job with USB/USR, but reaching parliament was
Appendix

his limit. As a leader, he should have stepped down and let someone else be the charismatic leader, like Cristian Ghinea. (With him I would see a different kind of problem, he’s not diplomatic, you never know what to expect from him).”

“I think they lost a train in February, if they would have opened and said come to us – but still keeping their criteria - they would have been better now. They could have had a lot of money by them, everybody would have donated them, if they had been a bit more pro-active in terms of protest. They should have been in front of the protests then. They should have come in the market, this is USR, this is what we want, this is what we do, join us! I think they lost it then.”

“It has to be the lack of trust towards the political class that Romanians have at this moment. And I think the big battle that we have in the next years is just convincing young people that voting is cool and gives them power.”

Remus Cernea

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<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Romania had at that time the most restricted [party] laws in Europe.”</td>
<td>System</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Romania will become a true democracy, when this country will have a president that is female, from the Roma community, lesbian and atheist; Because at that time it will mean that people will elect politicians without prejudices.”</td>
<td>Democracy</td>
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<td>“The hope of the people was broken every time after the elections.”</td>
<td>Disappointment</td>
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<td>“Unfortunately, we didn’t have democratic education in schools. [...] Without this information, Romania wasn’t able to help the young generations to become citizens, to become people who are aware about the social and democratic problems that we have to face. That’s why, a lot of young people unfortunately have a huge ignorance regarding the basic information about democracy and human rights. [...] It was improved, but too slow and too little.”</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>“Many people and among them a lot of very good people just decided to leave the country.”</td>
<td>Emigration</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Maybe some people think that politics is too dirty and why should I go and vote for a party which is full of corrupt people, who steal the public properties and funds. Why should I go to vote because all of them are quite the same.”</td>
<td>Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>“They think it is useless for good people to join politics, because there are only two ways, you will be corrupted or you will be destroyed by the others who are corrupt.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>“The electoral laws are very bad and very undemocratic in Romania. Imagine that in 2008 and 2012 we had a law for parliamentary elections that requested a huge amount of money in order to stand for elections. A party had to pay a tax for about 400.000 Euros. Imagine that for a small party it is impossible to pay such an amount. [...]They changed that law, with a new one, which is also very restrictive. You don’t have to pay, but you have to collect about 190.000 signatures on the national level.”</td>
<td>System</td>
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<tr>
<td>“In economy and sports we need competition in order to get performance, to get high results. This is the same in politics; you need real competition in order to hope that politicians will become better than they are.”</td>
<td>Options</td>
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<tr>
<td>“It [the system] is also restrictive for those who may go to vote; Because you can vote only in the constituency you live.”</td>
<td>Residence</td>
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</table>
“Protests in 2012 were against the very aggressive behavior of the president. The protests started after a TV debate. One famous doctor, Arafat, was in a studio in a debate on changes in the medical system. Arafat said his views and the president Băsescu called and when he was live by phone, he slandered in a very raw manner Mr. Arafat, the president was very aggressive against the person who is famous for saving lives. This was the moment the protests started.”

“In 2013 were other protests regarding Roșia Montana; […] Because the Ponta government decided after the elections that Romania need jobs, investment; […] In August I was the one who sent the media that project of the government for starting Rosia Montana project, because they wanted to change ten laws in order to start that project. […] In a few days, there were more and more articles and on September 1st the protests started. [...] The biggest protest ever for environmental issues in Romania ever.”

“These protests had no leaders.”

“Unfortunately you cannot build a democracy only with the protests; you need people in the parliament who have to fight day by day for a lot of issues.”

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“These protests had no leaders.”

“Unfortunately you cannot build a democracy only with the protests; you need people in the parliament who have to fight day by day for a lot of issues.”

“Maybe the only alternative in 2016 was USR.”

“There are some good people and some of them I respect, but the party is a huge disappointment too.”

“USR is another failure, another broken hope, because the people who came to vote for them, are very confused now. And this is mainly, this is my view, because of Nicușor Dan. He didn’t understand that he has to be a party of fresh ideas, not a conservative party.”

“Sooner or later this party will split – for the health of the party they have to split. [...] This messianic name is quite stupid honestly, because it is very dangerous to use this concepts, like “we are the saviors” – “we will save Romania”. But by whom, but who are you, the messiah? This time, just six months after the elections, they are not able to save themselves.”

“There was an effect, but it was two effects at the same time. The big parties, especially PNL lost many percent’s. [...] Maybe some of the voters from there go to others and I am sure for USR, that many people came for the first time to vote or there were many voters who didn’t vote for the big parties before.”

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“Protests were nonpolitical, people can support the cause, but they reject politics by default. This is very bad, but this is happening. They just don’t understand that we need parties or political forces to fight for the good causes in parliament.”

“USR showed to the people that it is possible and that is a very good thing, but it was shocking to watch them fail just in a few months.”

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<td>“Ich denke, das ist ein regionales Phänomen und die Gründe dürften auch ungefähr dieselben sein wie in den Nachbarländern. Ich führe das darauf zurück, einerseits, dass die Leute denken, sie könnten nicht wirklich etwas ändern oder bewirken, dass es so eine gefühlte Kluft gibt, die nochmal deutlich größer ist als bei allem Anti-Eliten- oder Lügenpresse Diskurs in Deutschland ist – dass also diese gefühlte Kluft weitaus größer ist zwischen den Menschen, die sich in die Politik geschmissen haben oder bereichert.</td>
<td>Powerless Distrust</td>
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Stephan Meuser
haben und den Wählern. Die politische Klasse ist definitiv korrupter als in Österreich oder in Deutschland, insofern gibt es objektive Gründe eines gegenseitigen Misstrauens oder einseitigen Misstrauens von unten nach oben.”

„Relativ erschreckend finde ich in Rumänien die Medienlandschaft. Man kann nicht nur nicht davon reden, dass sie die Menschen ertüchtigen würde oder wollte, dass sie am politischen Diskurs teilnehmen, sondern es ist eigentlich eine Abschreckung, die von den Medien ausgeht. Das kann man eigentlich nur noch als Inszenierung von Öffentlichkeit benennen. Es geht überhaupt nicht um Sachen, sondern meiner Sicht nur um Skandalisierung. Also sozusagen eine ständige Erregungskurve, die irgendwann sich selber nur noch bedienen kann, beziehungsweise dann auch zum Lahmen von Interesse eines Zuschauers führen kann.“

„Dann sind die Verwerfungen der letzten 25 Jahren sicher nicht hilfreich. Wenn man sich ansieht, dass große Teile der Bevölkerung arm sind, wirklich arm, auch biographisch teilweise mangels Infrastruktur. Und wenn du 25 Jahre überhaupt nichts rausbekommst, dann landest du sehr schnell bei Menschen die sagen, unter Ceausescu hatten wir wenigstens ..., warum soll ich dann jetzt diese Blödmänner wählen, es ändert sich ja doch nichts.”

„Insbesondere sind wir in Rumänien an der Schwelle zur Krise der repräsentativen Demokratie insgesamt. Wenn der Output irgendwann gegen Null tendiert und der Input bei 40 oder 38 % herum stagniert...“

„Und das letzte, aber auch nichts Rumänien-Typisches wäre dann so eine Art einschläfernder Klientelismus. Man kann schon davon ausgehen, dass es Netzwerke gibt auf dem Land, in dem Fall PSD, als stärkste Partei muss man sie auch dafür verantwortlich machen wenn Dorfbürgermeister den Leuten kleine materielle Vorteile geben, und dann ist es schon klar, dass die bitte wählen gehen. Das fördert jetzt natürlich nicht gerade den demokratischen Wettstreit der Ideen.“

„Es gibt keine riesigen Unterschiede. Es gibt regional höhere Beteiligungen – das ist dann sehr historisierend – in den Landesteilen, die zu Österreich gehörten, Ungarn gehörten, und eine geringere im sozusagen Altreich Rumänien, aber keine Riesen-Differenzen zwischen Stadt und Land über die zwanzig Jahre.“

„Vielleicht nicht unbedingt spezifisch rumänisch, aber doch typischer für die Region als für West- und Mitteleuropa, – der Glaube, dass man möglicherweise eher mit einer direkten Aktion etwas erreichen kann. Wenn man auf die Straße geht, dann ändert sich möglicherweise doch wirklich schneller etwas, als wenn man die lange Repräsentation- und Legitimationskette geht. Meiner eigenen These folgend ist möglicherweise von einem Teil der Leute Protest die präferierte Partizipationsform gegenüber den klassischen Wahlen.“

„Im Februar 2017 waren die größten Proteste seit 1989, aber selbst da handelt es sich nicht um eine Mehrheit. Das spielt sich hauptsächlich in Städten ab, das ist ein städtisches Phänomen der gebildeten Mittelklasse mit meistens ganz guten Jobs.“


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<tr>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Inequality</th>
<th>System Representation</th>
<th>Governance</th>
<th>Rural/urban</th>
<th>Outcome protest</th>
<th>Awareness protest</th>
<th>2017 protest</th>
<th>Consequence protest</th>
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<tr>
<td>„Die Protestbewegung ist so schnell vergangen, wie sie gekommen ist. Und es ist nicht gelungen, in irgendeiner Form ein neue Partei oder Bewegung zu gründen [...]. Es scheint über den kurzfristigen Erfolg hinaus keine Tiefen- oder Langfristwirkungen im politischen System zu geben.“</td>
<td>Impact protest</td>
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<td>„Außer einer Ausnahme – dass man jetzt schon annehmen kann, dass die Regierung oder alle politischen etablierten Parteien befürchten müssen, dass wenn sie im Bereich Rechtsstaatlichkeit jetzt wieder fundamental Komplettänderungen durchführen wollten, jederzeit sich wieder starker Gegenprotest mobilisieren kann. Das ist eigentlich bewiesen worden, es gab mal eine Mini-Aufwallung rund um den Grindeanu-Rücktritt, oder erzwungenen Rücktritt, und das zeigt mir eigentlich, dass, sobald man an diesem Thema stark rüttelt, man die Menschen wieder auf die Straße bekommen könnte, die Mobilisierbarkeit ist da.“</td>
<td>Outcome protest</td>
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<td>„Das Interessengruppen vor Fertigstellung eines Gesetzes integriert werden, das ist völlig unterentwickelt. Man könnte sich sowas wie Bürgerbeteiligung oder Interessenbeteiligung auf der Mikroebene denken, das findet hier auch schon statt, aber auf der Makroebene, das heißt für mich Parlament, vorgelagerte Ausschüsse, Anhörungen usw... Zeigt sich auch daran, dass wir eine Regierung haben, die ihr Programm buchstabengetreu abarbeitet. [...] Mir ist da noch zu wenig Interaktion für eine lebendige Gesellschaft zwischen der Sphäre der Berufspolitik und dem, was uns alle angeht, dem Politischen. [...] Es wird überhaupt nicht diskutiert über den Bereich Innere Sicherheit, das heißt hier Polizei, geheimdienste und eben äußere Sicherheit, es gibt keine öffentliche Debatte.“</td>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>„Im Fall der USB – USR gab es schon vorher, und in meiner Wahrnehmung hat sie sich auf diese Februarproteste nur drauf gesetzt, das ist nicht von denen ausgegangen, und sie haben es auch seither nicht geschafft, ihre Basis fundamental zu erweitern und streiten sich nur über den politischen Kurs.“</td>
<td>Protest USR</td>
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<td>„Da stehen die Chancen erstmal 50:50, dass eine Partei bleibt, weil es Menschen gibt, denen das eine sehr wichtig ist, aber auch vielen, denen das Andere viel wichtiger ist.“</td>
<td>Issue USR future</td>
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<td>„Sie propagieren und machen mehr als die anderen, in dem Sinn, dass es internetgestützter abläuft [...], sie versuchen ein bisschen, mittels Web 2.0 die Antwort darauf zu finden. Mangels großer Mitglieder in der Fläche ist dann wieder die inhärente Frage, ob das dann wirklich das Land Rumänien abbildet – das bildet wahrscheinlich Cluj, Temesvar und Bukarest ab und ignoriert Teile des Landes.“</td>
<td>USR</td>
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<td>„Die PNL war so schwach letztes Jahr, [...] und damit ist ein Teil der Wähler, die traditionell rechts der Mitte gewählt haben, heimatlos geworden und sie sind frustriert zu Hause geblieben in diesem Vakuum, was wiederum prozentual, nicht in absoluten Stimmen, diesen Riesenerfolg der PSD begünstigt hat. Auf der anderen Seite - ein kleinerer Teil der Wähler ist gewandert, aber um auf diese ich glaub 9 % zu kommen, hat das der PSD sogar geholfen, dass der größere Teil der alten PNL-Wähler zu Hause geblieben ist.“</td>
<td>Voting 2016</td>
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