

HABILITATION THESIS

VOTING BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

ABSTRACT

Candidate: Assoc. Prof. Andrei GHEORGHÎȚĂ, Ph.D.

This thesis reviews my main scientific, teaching, and professional achievements in the field of sociology over the last six years, after receiving the doctoral degree. It is aimed at providing solid arguments in favour of my claim of fulfilling the requirements for a habilitation in Sociology. In order to comply with the legal requirements, the thesis is structured in two main sections: (1) a review of the main original results, within the framework of the recent international developments in the literature, followed by a career development plan; (2) a review of arguments in favour of my capacity to manage high level research and education.

The most significant part of the thesis is focused on my main scientific findings in the fields of voting behaviour and social solidarity. In relation to voting behaviour, my research was mainly focused on four directions: (A1) magnitude of leader effects on vote choice across various electoral contexts; (A2) variations in the magnitude of leader effects in relation to voter characteristics, leader characteristics, and party characteristics; (A3) rationalities of thwarted voters and newcomers for making second-order vote choices in a presidential runoff; (A4) effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in reducing self-reported turnout.

On the first direction, my recent research is related to assessing the impact of national political leaders for the vote choice in the elections for the European Parliament (Gheorghîță 2010). It is quite a novel approach, as studies on personalization of the voting behaviour tend to focus on national elections. For the 2009 European elections in Romania, the analyses show that the evaluations of political leaders and candidate lists do matter for the results, but to a lesser degree than party identification, government performance in office or the political affiliation of the mayor. Compared to national elections, leader effects on voting appear to be lower in European elections.

On the second direction, my research investigates the conditions that moderate the magnitude of leader effects, acting as stimuli or inhibitors: voter characteristics, leader characteristics, and party characteristics. A first article (Gheorghiuță 2015) explores how individual voter characteristics moderated the 'Băsescu effect' in the 2012 legislative elections in Romania. The results of the analyses show that voter's political knowledge and party identification do stimulate the personalization of voting behaviour, while the self-assessed stock of political information, interest in politics, and time of the vote decision have no significant influence on leader effects. A book chapter (Gheorghiuță 2014) investigates the impact of perceived personal traits of the two presidential candidates in the 2004 national elections on the electoral choice. The analyses provide evidences in favour of the finding that candidates' perceived competence, integrity, and leadership are strongly reflected in their evaluations and, consequently, in the results of the elections, while empathy appears to be unimportant. Two conference papers co-authored with Mircea Comșa (2014, 2015) investigate the impact of easily observable leader characteristics and party characteristics on the magnitude of electoral personalization in a comparative approach to post-communist legislative elections in Central and Eastern Europe on CSES data. In relation to leader characteristics, our results show that age, experience in executive positions, party leadership experience, and being a top member of the former communist party do stimulate the magnitude of personalization, while former dissidents are less likely to generate leader effects. No significant effects are related to gender. In relation to party characteristics, our analyses show that the voting decision is more leader-centred for older parties, governing parties, conservative, liberal, and communist parties. Leaders appear to be less important in the eyes of the voters of social democrat, national, and agrarian parties. Party size and left-right ideological positioning have no significant effect on the relevance of leaders for the results of elections.

On the third direction, my research explores the topic of vote transfers between the first and the second round of the 2009 Romanian presidential elections, focusing on the thwarted voters and newcomers and their rationalities of voting in a presidential runoff. The results, published in a book chapter (Gheorghiuță 2012), show that in their attempt to choose between two finalists, thwarted voters appear to rely dominantly on their long-term relative preference for parties and candidates. In their case, the party preference is a better predictor of the runoff vote than the candidate preference, which is quite natural if we consider that both finalists had already been labelled as politically 'unattractive' by this category of voters in the first round. Newcomers appear to have a significantly lower exposure to political information and a deficit of political trust. Their vote in the runoff is mainly based on the relative preference for the party, namely a rationality by comparison resulting in a preference (or rejection) for one finalist's party over the other's.

On the fourth direction, it is investigated the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in compensating for the social desirability bias and, consequently, reducing self-reported

turnout. In an article co-authored with Mircea Comşa (2016) we compare the effects of three alternatives of 'loaded' turnout questions, providing variable information on the occurrence of non-voting behaviour (many people/around half of the people/one out of two people did not vote) and invariant face-saving response options. Self-reported turnout is compared against externally validated turnout. Our analyses show that the 'half' counter-biasing formula is systematically more effective in reducing the social desirability bias than the alternatives, which perform rather similarly. When compared to validated turnout, it appears that, after applying the counter-biasing techniques, turnout overreporting due to social desirability remains at 5.7 to 8.6 percent.

In relation to social solidarity, my research was mainly focused on two directions: (B1) the role of transnational solidarity in confining sceptic attitudes towards further EU enlargement and (B2) the impact of the economic crisis on various forms of solidarity. On the first direction, an article co-authored with Horațiu Rusu (2014) investigates on data from EVS 2008-2009 whether reluctance to further EU enlargement may be partially due to a deficit in transnational solidarity. Our analyses show that increased levels of transnational solidarity appear to confine anti-enlargement attitudes when alternative explanations are statistically controlled for. Thus, support for the EU enlargement is enforced when the object of solidarity goes beyond kinship, own ethnic group or nationality. Transnational solidarity holds a statistically significant impact on the attitude towards EU broadening no matter what combination of predictors is considered, having rather small variations in the values of unstandardized coefficients.

On the second direction of research in relation to social solidarity, three year distance panel data (before and after the peak of the economic crisis) are employed for investigating the impact of the austerity measures on various solidarities in Romania. In a conference paper co-authored with Horațiu Rusu (2013), we show that solidarity with the members of the community identified territorially ('insiders') has significantly increased under the pressure of the crisis: it is the case for the solidarity felt in relation with people in the locality, citizens of Romania. However, the level of solidarity with the 'outsiders' (Europeans, humans all over the world) has remained almost constant over the period of crisis. Based on a multilevel regression model built on measures of change (2013 compared to 2009), we argue that cuts in local welfare spending have stimulated solidarity with the 'insiders', in what appears to be a mechanism of social defence.

In addition to this review of the most important research findings after receiving the doctoral degree, the thesis provides a second set of arguments in support of my claim of fulfilling the requirements for a habilitation in Sociology, in relation to my ability to manage high level research and education. Presently, I am an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of Journalism, Public Relations, Sociology and Psychology. I joined my current department (at that moment the Chair of Sociology and Social Work) in 2007, as a Teaching Assistant (2007). Following competitive procedures, I was

promoted as a Lecturer (2007-2014) and then as an Associate Professor in 2014. As a researcher, I have tried to establish a national and international profile at the same time. I have disseminated my research results nationally and internationally (through prestigious publishers such as Oxford University Press, Sciences Po, or Polirom) and recognition came under the form of my research being cited in highly respected contexts (academic journals such as *East European Politics and Societies*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Perspectives on Politics*, *Integrative Psychological and Behavioural Science* and *Journal for East European Management Studies* or publications at Cambridge University Press, Routledge or Springer).

The thesis also presents the main components of my teaching activities: I teach subjects in the area of political and electoral sociology (Political Sociology, The Sociology of Public Opinion and Electoral Analysis, and Politics and Society) and social data analysis (Social Statistics, Advanced Statistics, Management and Analysis of Social Data in Organisations) for both undergraduate and graduate students in the field of Sociology and I supervise BA and MA graduation theses in the field. Then it discusses my teaching strategies, as well as my efforts to improve my teaching activities both in terms of methods and contents. Then, the thesis details my professional activities with an emphasis on consultancy, involvement in professional associations, organising academic events, acting as editor and reviewer for academic journals, and acting as evaluator. Most importantly, I am actively involved in some of the most important national and international research networks and groups in my areas of expertise (Romanian Election Studies - RES, Comparative Study of Electoral Systems - CSES, How to Progress European Solidarity – HOPES, etc.), as well as in several professional associations in the field (RSS, ESA, EPSA, ISPP, RQSA).

The thesis also discusses my career development plans for the next five years. The main objectives discussed concern: increasing the relevance of my research results, as well as my visibility within the national and international scientific community; developing my teaching skills and the continuous updating of the scientific contents of the classes I teach; consolidating my data analysis skills; and increasing my involvement in the professional community and the local community. In addition, my thesis also discusses the actual research directions I intend to pursue in the next five years.

Amongst the arguments related to my capacity to advise doctoral students in Sociology, the thesis also discusses my management of teaching and research skills. Thus, it details my experience in managing research in research teams and national and international research networks. Then, it details my experience in managing organisational structures oriented on research and teaching (the *Social Change Review*, the Centre for Social Research, and the Department of Journalism, Public Relations, Sociology, and Psychology) and the manner in which the experience with such structures could contribute to success in advising doctoral students.

References:

- Comșa, Mircea, and Andrei Gheorghiuță. 2016 (forthcoming). „'Many', 'half' or 'one out of two'? Assessing the effectiveness of counter-biasing techniques in reducing self-reported turnout”. *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* 55.
- Gheorghiuță, Andrei. 2010. „Cum explicăm votul? Lideri politici, candidați și construcția deciziei de vot”. In *Alegerile pentru Parlamentul European. România, 2009*, eds. Mircea Comșa, Andrei Gheorghiuță, and Claudiu D. Tufiș, 147-70. Iași: Polirom.
- — —. 2012. „Transferuri de voturi, alegători nereprezentăți și nou-veniți în cel de-al doilea tur al competiției prezidențiale din 2009”. In *Alegerile prezidențiale din România, 2009*, eds. Mircea Comșa, Andrei Gheorghiuță, and Claudiu D. Tufiș, 97-116. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană.
- — —. 2014. „Determining the Components of Leader Effects in a Post-Communist Context”. În *Personality Politics? The Role of Leader Evaluations in Democratic Elections*, eds. Marina Costa Lobo și John Curtice, 191-212. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- — —. 2015. „Voter Characteristics and Leader Effects in a Post-Communist Context: The Case of the 2012 Legislative Elections in Romania”. *Romanian Journal of Political Science* 15 (1): 52-79.
- Gheorghiuță, Andrei, and Mircea Comșa. 2014. „Party characteristics and leader effects in post-communist polities.” European Sociological Association RN36 Midterm Conference „25 Years after the Communism: East and West of Europe in Search of Solidarity”, Gdańsk, 16-18 octombrie.
- — —. 2015. „The personalization of electoral politics and leader characteristics in the Eastern post-communist bloc”. 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Praga, 25-28 august 2015.
- Rusu, Horațiu, and Andrei Gheorghiuță. 2013. „Social Solidarity in Distorted Times: Unfolding the Romanian Case”. 11th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Torino, 28-31 august.
- — —. 2014. „Transnational Solidarity and Public Support for the EU Enlargement”. *Sociologia* 46 (3): 261-82.