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# A party for all seasons: Electoral adaptation of Romanian Communist successor parties

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## Abstract

This article analyzes the reasons for the remarkable adaptability and electoral success of Communist successor parties in post-1990 Romania. The first part develops a three-dimensional classification scheme to identify Communist successor parties on the basis of their institutional, personnel and ideological continuity with the defunct Communist Party. The second section traces the political evolution of Communist successor parties, and argues that their remarkably strong and consistent electoral performance is primarily due to their ability to appeal to voters beyond the traditional base of East European ex-Communist parties on the left of the ideological spectrum. The final section uses survey data to suggest that the continued electoral appeal of Communist successor parties in Romania is due neither to Communist nostalgia or lack of democracy but to the complicated legacy of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution. © 2008 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of The Regents of the University of California.

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Măi, ce blestem o fi pe poporul ăsta de a ajuns, până la urmă, săaleagă între doi foști comuniști? Intre Adrian Năstase si Bănescu (Traian Bănescu, TVR 12/9/2004)

During a televised debate in the days prior to the second round of the 2004 Romanian presidential elections, Traian Bănescu, the candidate of the center–right

Justice and Truth Alliance (*Dreptate și Adevăr DA*), rhetorically asked why the Romanian people were cursed with having to choose among two former Communists: himself and the outgoing Prime Minister Adrian Năstase. Given that the DA's campaign theme during the 2004 elections borrowed heavily from Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Bănescu's question was as poignant as it was surprising. While Bănescu was primarily referring to the fact that both he and his opponent had not only been Communist Party members but had done quite well under the Communist regime, his comment actually captures a deeper and more troubling aspect of Romania's post-communist political development; Bănescu and Năstase represented political parties originating from two former factions of the National Salvation Front (*Frontul Salvării Naționale FSN*), which had emerged in 1990 as the unofficial successor to the Romanian Communist Party. The country's first elections for the European Parliament in November 2007 further confirmed that after almost two decades of democratic elections the Romanian political scene has come full circle; thus, the two former FSN factions, now competing as the center-right Democratic Party (*Partidul Democrat PD*) and the center-left Social-Democratic Party (*Partidul Social Democrat PSD*) jointly captured more than half the votes and almost two-thirds of the seats. This performance not only established them as the country's two most important political parties but it almost matched (at least in terms of seats) the commanding victory of their common ancestor in the 1990 elections.

While Communist successor parties have successfully dominated the center-left part of the ideological spectrum in many ex-Communist democracies (including Bulgaria, Hungary, Albania and Poland), the PD's emergence as the dominant center-right party in Romania after 2004 is unique among the region's democracies and requires further explanation. However, even before the PD's remarkable ideological reorientation, Romania stood out as the only East European democracy where representatives of Communist successor parties have been represented in virtually every government since the fall of Communism despite three genuine power turnovers between 1990 and 2004. These puzzling developments raise a series of interesting questions not only about the nature of Romanian party politics but more broadly about how to conceptualize and analyze Communist successor parties. In the first part of the paper, I define the Romanian Communist successor parties and discuss the peculiar brand of Romanian Communism. Combined with the ambiguous nature of its collapse in December 1989, it complicates the usually straightforward task of defining post-communist successor parties and requires a multi-dimensional definition, which differentiates between institutional continuity, personnel continuity and ideological continuity. Next, I document the remarkable dominance of Romanian post-communist politics by parties linked by at least one of the above dimensions to the Communist Party. In the final part of the paper I evaluate three possible explanations of this successor party dominance: (1) a democratic deficit in Romanian politics, (2) popular support for Communism, (3) the legacies of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution.

## Defining successor parties: the Romanian challenge and its theoretical payoffs

Communist successor parties can be identified along three dimensions (1) institutional continuity, whereby political parties trace their lineage directly to that of the Communist Party; (2) leadership and personnel continuity and (3) ideological continuity. Despite their theoretical distinctiveness, these three dimensions are often highly correlated in practice, which makes the task of identifying Communist successor parties fairly straightforward in most of the former Soviet bloc: following the collapse of Communism, the former ruling parties either continued to operate under their former names and with relatively minor ideological changes, as in the Czech Republic and in many former Soviet republics, or they changed their names and ideological orientations to socialist or social-democratic, as in Hungary, Poland or Bulgaria. While the reform process usually involved considerable ideological struggles, the replacement of the party's top leadership (at least among the emerging East European democracies) and sometimes an open split between the reformers and the hard-liners, the institutional continuity was never contested, much of the leadership of the reformed parties came from the middle echelons of the former Communist parties (Machos, 1997; Pop-Eleches, 1999) and these parties usually chose left-of-center political platforms. By contrast, in the Romanian case the situation is much more ambiguous with respect to both institutional and ideological continuities and has not been fully resolved by subsequent scholarship on the question (Innes, 2002). Therefore, in the remainder of this section, I will discuss each of these dimensions separately and analyze the extent to which the main Romanian successor party candidates fulfill these criteria.

### Institutional continuity

From an institutional continuity perspective, the peculiar nature of the December 1989 revolution considerably complicates the task of identifying successor parties, because the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) was outlawed immediately following the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, and initially no other political party claimed its highly compromised legacy. However, the institutional void left behind by the PCR's demise was filled by the Council of the National Salvation Front (CFSN), which was formed immediately after Ceaușescu's overthrow, and took over many of the state powers previously exercised by the Communist Party. Initially, its leaders denied that they intended to transform the CFSN into a political party, in part because Ion Iliescu advocated an original democracy based on competition between different political currents within the movement rather than between political parties. However, following its registration as a political party in February 1990, the National Salvation Front (FSN) became the subject of intense criticisms by both domestic opponents and outside observers, who feared that despite its official claims of being the political outgrowth of the anti-communist revolution, the FSN was rapidly taking over the Communist party-state under the leadership of several former high-ranking Communist officials. However, it is crucial to keep in mind that whereas elsewhere in the region one of the major debates at the time was whether the

ideological conversion of the Communists was genuine/significant, in Romania the debate focused on whether or not the FSN was a successor to the Communist Party. Judging by the Front's commanding electoral victory in May 1990, Romanian voters seem to have largely believed the FSN's version of the story despite the widespread opposition protests with "FSN = PCR" banners. On the other hand, most analysts of post-Communist parties were not as easily persuaded, and have classified the FSN as a Communist successor party (Ishiyama, 1995, 1997; Pop-Eleches, 1999).

Institutional continuity assessments in the Romanian case are further complicated by the FSN's split in March 1992 following months of bitter conflicts between factions backing President Ion Iliescu or the former Prime Minister and erstwhile Iliescu-protégé, Petre Roman. Even though Roman's more reformist faction won the intra-party vote, it was Mr. Iliescu's hard-line splinter party – the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN) that won the subsequent national elections and emerged as the dominant leftist party in Romania. Therefore, the FDSN, which later changed its name to PDSR and eventually to PSD, is consistently identified as a Communist successor party in the literature. By contrast, opinions diverge about how to classify what was left of the original FSN, which despite its social-democratic platform and affiliation to the Socialist International chose to ally itself with the anti-communist opposition instead of its erstwhile party comrades.<sup>1</sup> However, from the point of view of institutional continuity, the FSN, despite its later name change to Democratic Party (PD) and recently to Democratic Liberal Party (PD-L) arguably qualifies as a successor party, given that it initially kept the party name and still uses its electoral symbol (the Rose). This argument is further reinforced by the fact that the FSN MPs from the 1990–1992 legislature, who were elected to Parliament in 2004, were almost evenly split between the PSD and the PD, and actually represented a higher proportion of PD MPs (15 percent) than for the PSD (9 percent).

Among the other political parties in post-communist Romania, the only other candidate for institutional continuity was the Socialist Work Party (PSM), founded in November 1990 by a former Communist Prime Minister, Ilie Verdeț. Unlike the FSN and its offshoots, the PSM openly proclaimed its links to the defunct Communist Party but did not inherit any of its assets, which had been taken over by the state in the aftermath of the revolution.

### **Leadership and personnel continuity**

Due to the Communist Party dissolution in January 1990, none of the post-Communist parties directly inherited its membership base. Since Romania had the highest proportion of Communist Party members in Central-Eastern Europe (Janos, 2000), former Party members were involved in all post-Communist parties<sup>2</sup> and while their concentration was probably higher in the FSN and its successors,

<sup>1</sup> For example, Timmermann (1994) classifies it as a successor party, while Ishiyama (1995) does not.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include Emil Constantinescu, the presidential candidate of the staunchly anti-communist CDR in 1992 and 1996.

simple Party membership is at best a blunt measure of continuity in the Romanian context.

Therefore, the more important aspect of personnel continuity concerns the role played in a given party by individuals with leadership functions in the Communist Party and state apparatus. In this respect, despite the decisive purge of the Ceaușescu clan and its closest associates, the prominent role of several high-ranking former Communist officials in the top FSN leadership in the immediate post-revolutionary period, combined with the rapid and acrimonious departure of most anti-communist dissidents from the FSN leadership by January–February 1990, led to vehement complaints by the opposition that the Romanian revolution had been stolen by a Communist cabal (Tismaneanu, 2003). However, some of the most controversial leaders (including Mazilu, Brucan and Chițac) were quietly dropped from the FSN leadership in 1990, and even though several remaining leaders (including Iliescu, Roman, and Năstase) had close personal and family ties to high-level Communist circles, none of them had played a significant role in the Ceaușescu regime during the 1980s. Moreover, even the more hard-line faction of the FSN, which aligned itself with Mr. Iliescu against Roman's reformers, actually had lower levels of personnel continuity with second and third-echelon Communist Party officials than their Hungarian counterpart (Pop-Eleches, 1999).

Once again, the links to the Communist past were the strongest for the PSM, which was composed primarily of former Communist Party activists, and whose leadership, included not only Ilie Verdeț but also another unapologetic defender of the Ceaușescu regime, the former court poet Adrian Păunescu. After a rather disappointing series of elections, the PSM eventually sidelined Verdeț to a ceremonial position, and was eventually absorbed into the PSD in 2003.

The last party worth mentioning in this context is the Greater Romania Party (PRM) founded in mid-1991 by the editor of the extreme nationalist weekly *România Mare*, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. While the party was not a direct institutional heir of the Communist Party, Vadim was another former court poet and apologist of Ceaușescu and the PRM was the most vocal opponent of President Băseșcu's initiative to condemn Communism in Romania.

### **Ideological orientation**

Whereas Communist successor parties elsewhere in Central-Eastern Europe have generally espoused various gradations of leftist ideological appeals ranging from the intransigent stance of the Czech KSČM to the more centrist messages of the Polish SLD and the Hungarian MSZP, in Romania political parties with ties to the former Communist Party have shown an even greater ideological flexibility, which has allowed them to occupy much of the political space in successive post-communist elections. Not surprisingly, the dominance of former Communists has been the clearest on the left of the political spectrum, ranging from the openly anti-market rhetoric of the PSM and the PRM, to the gradualist reform approach advocated by the PDSR in the early to mid-1990s, and to the market-embracing

social-democratic approach of the PD after 1992 and the PSD starting in the late 1990s. Given how densely populated the left side of the political spectrum was for most of the 1990s, it is perhaps not surprising that the non-Communist Social-Democratic Party (PDSR) failed to make significant electoral inroads and eventually agreed to merge with the ex-Communist PSD in 2001.

The second crucial facet of the Romanian ex-Communists' electoral appeal – the reliance on ethnic nationalist appeals – sets them apart from many of their East European counterparts (including in Poland, Hungary, Croatia and Macedonia) and places some of them in uncomfortably close proximity to their Russian and Serbian “comrades.” Whereas in Russia and Serbia, this elective affinity between Communism and nationalism is arguably due to the trauma of post-communist territorial disintegration, in Romania the secessionist threat of Hungarian-majority parts of Transylvania was not nearly as credible, even though it definitely lent itself to similar rhetoric. Instead, the trend was rooted in Ceaușescu's peculiar brand of national Communism, which combined a highly popular emphasis on foreign policy independence (Janos, 2000) with significant ethno-nationalist rhetoric, directed primarily at the country's Hungarian minority. In this respect, the Romanian case has certain parallels to Bulgaria, where Zhivkov's nationalist campaign against the Turkish minority also reverberated in the post-communist period, though with somewhat weaker intensity. Therefore, while reliance on ethnic nationalism is by no means sufficient to categorize a political party as a successor party, in the Romanian context such an orientation is at least compatible with continuing the political legacy of the Communist regime.

The most visible “heir” of the nationalist dimension of Ceaușescu's legacy was undoubtedly Corneliu Vadim Tudor's PRM, which took Ceaușescu's occasionally shrill discourse to its (il)logical extreme and tended to blame most of Romania's post-communist ills on a combination of foreign plots and ethnic minorities (including not only Hungarians but also Jews and Roma). Despite a brief period of moderation after 2000, when Vadim publicly renounced his former anti-Semitism and the PRM tried to reinvent itself as a popular, Christian Democratic Party, the party's primary electoral appeal has been extreme ethnic nationalism. The track record of the other successor parties was more mixed; thus, the FSN used nationalist appeals to discredit the anti-communist opposition both before and after the May 1990 elections. Following the 1992 split of the FSN, Petre Roman's rump FSN (and later the PD) abandoned the use of nationalism, a decision which facilitated its membership in the Socialist International and its collaboration with the anti-communist opposition. Meanwhile, Iliescu's FDSN/PDSR continued the use of opportunist nationalism during its 1992–1996 stint in government, in part because its minority government needed the support of several minor “red-brown” parties (including the PRM and the PSM). However, following a bizarre and ultimately unsuccessful nationalist outburst during the 1996 elections, in which Iliescu warned about the coming “Yugoslavization” of Romania, the PDSR ultimately abandoned nationalism after 1997 in search of greater domestic and international respectability. This reorientation was confirmed by the fact that after its electoral victory in 2000, the party governed

with the Hungarian minority party UDMR instead of going back to its erstwhile coalition partner PRM.

While the various shades of leftist and nationalist appeals are if not typical then at least not unprecedented by regional standards, the Romanian successor parties stand out in their ability to adopt ideological orientations which are completely unrelated — and in fact largely opposed — to the country's Communist legacy. The most remarkable example in this respect is the aforementioned ideological U-turn of the PD in 2005, which underwent a swift and apparently painless transformation from being a member in the Socialist International at the time of the November 2004 elections, to joining the European People's Party less than half a year later and becoming the main supporter of President Băsescu's effort to condemn the crimes of Communism in Romania. Nor was the PD the only party with institutional roots in the former Communist Party to abandon leftist ideology altogether; thus, following a failed attempt to reform the PDSR after its 1996 electoral loss, a group of disaffected MPs under the former PDSR foreign Minister Teodor Meleşcanu founded the Alliance for Romania (ApR), which eventually joined the liberal, anti-communist PNL in 2001 after a failed attempt at running for Parliament independently in 2000.<sup>3</sup>

### **Post-communist electoral performance of successor parties**

Even a brief look at the parliamentary election results (Table 1) reveals the consistency with which Communist successor parties have dominated Romanian politics in the last two decades. Following the crushing victory of the FSN over a variety of hastily assembled and poorly organized opposition parties in 1990, the 1992 elections represented a significant step towards democratic normalization, and assuaged the justified initial fears that Romania could slip towards renewed authoritarianism along the lines of many former Soviet republics. Even though Iliescu's FDSN/PDSR emerged as the largest parliamentary faction, it commanded less than half of the vote and seat share of the FSN in 1990, and its subsequent performance (marked by decline in 1996, followed by a significant boost in 2000 and 2004 and a renewed decline in the 2007 European Parliament elections) is quite similar to that of the main Communist successor parties in such countries like Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria.

Therefore, the Romanian party system stands out not because of the electoral dominance of its main Communist successor party but because of the surprisingly good performance of several smaller political parties, which also traced their institutional, personnel and/or ideological roots to the Communist Party but found alternative electoral niches that allowed them (at least temporarily) to survive. In this respect, it is worth emphasizing the electoral trajectory of two parties, the PD and the PRM. Following its disappointing electoral loss in 1992 against its former "comrades" in the original National Salvation Front, the PD contested the following

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<sup>3</sup> Meleşcanu, who worked as a diplomat under the Ceauşescu regime and has been accused of collaborating with the Securitate, is currently one of the vice-presidents of the PNL.



Table 1

## Communist successor party overview

Party name	Claim Communist legacy	Institutional link	Economic policy	Nationalism	Leaders
Social-Democratic Party (PSD)	Partly	Yes (via FSN)	L → CL	Opportunist (pre-97)	Iliescu Năstase Geoană
Democratic Party (PD)	Partly → No	Yes (via FSN)	CL → CR	No	Roman Bănescu
Greater Romania Party (PRM)	Yes	No	L	Extreme	Vadim
Socialist Work Party (PSM)	Yes	Yes	XL	Opportunist	Verdeț Păunescu

two elections as the more moderate and internationally palatable leftist alternative to Iliescu's PSD, and even though it never succeeded to challenge the latter's dominance among transition losers, it managed to survive as a parliamentary party even after its participation in the disastrous center-right coalition government of 1996–2000. In 2004 the PD managed to stage an impressive comeback as part of the Truth and Justice (DA) alliance with the liberal PNL, and by 2007 it rode the coattails of President's Bănescu's popularity to become the strongest Romanian political party.

Meanwhile, the PRM's electoral fortunes were almost a mirror-image of the PD's trajectory; thus, the PRM barely squeezed into parliament in 1992 and 1996 thanks to Romania's rather low 3 percent electoral threshold, but then it scored a stunning electoral success in 2000, when it emerged as the second largest parliamentary party with almost 20 percent of the vote, largely fueled by Vadim's personal popularity, which earned him 30 percent of the first-round presidential vote in the same elections. While part of this success was due to the PRM's ability to capture most of the previously fragmented nationalist electorate along with a hard core of Communist nostalgia, the unexpected surge in Vadim's popularity in the two weeks prior to the elections arguably reflected a wave of protest voters disenchanted with the country's mainstream parties and attracted by Vadim's effective and colorful anti-establishment rhetoric during a televised presidential debate (Pop-Eleches, 2001). However, by 2004 the party's support declined significantly (albeit to a still fairly healthy 13 percent) and the decline continued during the 2007 EP elections, when the PRM failed to reach the 5 percent threshold. Therefore, it is conceivable that in the upcoming elections the PRM could meet the fate of its ideological "cousin," the PSM, which managed to squeeze into parliament in 1992 (with barely 3 percent of the vote) but then failed to pass the electoral threshold in subsequent elections and was eventually absorbed by the PSD in 2003.

Despite the changing electoral fortunes of individual Communist successor parties, this brief overview of post-1989 election results suggests a remarkable stability in the combined vote share of Communist successor parties. As illustrated in Table 2, these parties consistently managed to attract the support of between half and two-thirds of Romanian voters and just as consistently outperformed the explicitly anti-communist



Table 2  
Electoral results for successor parties

Party	Communist successor party	%Vote 1990	%Vote 1992	%Vote 1996	%Vote 2000	%Vote 2004	%Vote EP 2007
PSD	Yes	66.0	27.7	21.5	36.6	36.6	23.1
PD	Yes	(FSN)	10.2	12.9	7.0	31.3	28.8
PNL	No	6.9	20.0	30.2	6.9		13.4
PNTCD	No	2.6	(CDR)	(CDR)	5.0 <sup>a</sup>	1.9 <sup>a</sup>	1.4 <sup>a</sup>
UDMR	No	7.2	7.5	6.6	6.8	6.2	5.5
PRM	Yes	—	3.9	4.5	19.5	12.9	4.2 <sup>a</sup>
PUNR	No	2.1	7.7	4.4	1.4 <sup>a</sup>	—	—
PSM	Yes	—	3.0	2.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.8 <sup>a</sup>	—	—
Total		66	44.8	41	68	62.9	56.1
ex-Communist							
Largest non-Communist		7.2	20.1	30.2	6.9	17.9	13.4

<sup>a</sup> Failed to gain any seats.

and non-Communist parties. However, unlike in many former Soviet republics, the dominance of successor parties has not been due to the ability of the “party in power” to shut out any potential political challengers. Instead, successor parties did well at least in part because they managed to diversify in both institutional and ideological terms. In doing so, they ensured that parties with direct links to the previous regime were never completely out of power after 1989 but their ideological “flexibility” and political pragmatism paved the way for governing alliances with anti-communist reformers (for example, PD’s participation in the 1996–2000 CDR government and in the 2004–2007 DA alliance) and thereby contributed to the country’s initially uncertain political liberalization. Nevertheless, this remarkable ability of Communist successor parties to dominate post-communist politics requires further explanation. Therefore in the final section of the paper I will consider a number of potential explanations for this outcome and discuss their implications for our understanding of successor parties and post-Communist politics more broadly.

### Explanations for the diversity of Romania’s successor parties

According to a political anecdote, Argentina’s populist leader, Juan Peron, was asked during his exile in Spain to explain the often confusing political landscape in his country. He replied that Argentina was not all that different from other countries, in that it had its share of rightists, centrists and leftists. When the reporter asked him where the Peronists fell on this spectrum, Peron famously replied “Of course, they’re all Peronists!” The present analysis suggests a comparable story for post-communist Romania, in the sense that the last two decades have seen the rise of leftist, nationalist and more recently Christian Democratic parties, which could ultimately trace their lineage to the defunct Romanian Communist Party. However, unlike Argentina, post-communist Romania did not have a Peron-like populist leader,

whose personal charisma could help reconcile such disparate ideological tendencies under one institutional umbrella. Therefore, this section will focus on three potential explanations for the remarkable adaptability of Romanian ex-Communists and their somewhat puzzling cross-ideological appeals.

### **Lack of democracy**

A quick glance at the countries where Communist successor parties have dominated post-communist politics (the Central Asian republics, Azerbaijan, and until recently Serbia and Georgia) suggests a straightforward interpretation along the lines of [McFaul's \(2002\)](#) argument about non-cooperative transitions – namely that the initially dominant Communists cemented their political power by rigging the rules of political competition in their favor to exclude non-Communist challengers. Indeed democratic prospects did not look very promising during the first few months of 1990, which were marred by ethnic clashes, flawed elections and government-condoned violence against anti-communist demonstrators. However, after a slow start, Romania's democratization trajectory gradually converged with the region's front-runners, and achieved the Freedom House "Free" status after 1996, thereby becoming the only transition country to achieve full democracy after a decisive ex-Communist victory in the initial elections ([McFaul's, 2002](#), p. 237). While Romanian democracy certainly suffered from a number of hiccups along the way – with accusations of government attempts to interfere with media freedom and opposition claims of electoral fraud as recently as 2004 – such blemishes were not sufficiently severe to explain the consistently strong overall electoral performance of Communist successor parties. While questions persist about the fairness of the 1992 elections ([Carey, 1995](#)), subsequent electoral contests were widely sanctioned as free and fair by international observers and in both 1996 and 2004 resulted in electoral defeats of the ex-Communist incumbents (PDSR/PSD), who accepted defeat and turned power over to coalitions dominated by non-Communists.

### **Popular support for Communism**

Given Romania's difficult economic legacies, large agricultural sector, and prior experience with austerity during the 1980s, Romanians were understandably reluctant to endorse further economic sacrifices required by the drastic market reforms proposed by the anti-communist opposition prior to the 1990 elections ([Daianu, 1997](#)). As [Tismaneanu \(2003\)](#) argues, while Romanians had rejected the Ceaușescu regime in 1989, large parts of the population still favored key elements of the Communist welfare state. The FSN's spending spree in early 1990 combined with assurances about a more gradual approach and painless approach to economic reforms undoubtedly contributed to the ex-Communists' broad popularity and resounding electoral success. However, while such gradualist preferences were clearly visible in 1991, when Romania was the only East European country where a majority of respondents (57.7%) thought that a market economy was wrong for their country, by the following year 73% of Romanians favored a free

market economy and pro-market attitudes in the country have been above the regional average ever since.<sup>4</sup> Nor did the economic hardships and political disappointments of the transition result in a substantial popular reorientation towards Communism; as illustrated by survey data presented in Table 3, the share of self-declared Communists among Romanian voters was minimal in 2000–2004 (2–3 percent). Moreover, even though Social Democrats constituted the largest voting block and provided the backbone for the ex-Communist PSD's strong electoral showing, they only accounted for one-third of the electorate, a proportion roughly in line with the regional average (Table 3).

### **The political legacy of the Ceaușescu regime and the 1989 revolution**

While a more detailed discussion of the complicated legacy of Ceaușescu's rule and demise is beyond the scope of this paper, I will focus on a few aspects that are crucial for understanding Romania's post-communist electoral dynamics. First, Ceaușescu's skillful use of nationalism in both foreign policy and domestic ethnic relations had an important impact on the post-Communist uses of nationalism in Romania. The country's relative foreign policy independent from the Soviet Union had become an obstacle to political liberalization by the late 1980s as it allowed Ceaușescu to resist Gorbachev's *glasnost* and therefore precluded a nationalist mobilization. Instead, the ex-Communists "owned" the subject and this deprived the anti-communist opposition of one of the most potent ideological weapons in post-communist politics (Tismaneanu, 1998). Thus, nationalism in Romania was not harnessed in the service of national liberation and democratization as in the Baltics, Slovenia and even Moldova and Western Ukraine (Kuzio, 2001; Bunce, 2003) but was instead focused on internal conflicts about the threats to territorial integrity posed by the autonomy claims of the Hungarian minority. While the Hungarian–Romanian dispute about Transylvania obviously predates Communist rule, it was used to shore up regime support not only by Ceaușescu in the 1980s but also by the less reformed elements of the former Communist Party in the early 1990s.

Second, Ceaușescu's totalitarian regime and its brutal repression of anti-communist opponents resulted in a weak and fragmented anti-communist opposition, which did not have the organizational capacity or the potential leadership reservoir of many other East European countries, especially Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia (Ekiert, 1996). Furthermore, the thorough politicization of the state apparatus meant that most bureaucrats and experts were likely to be integrated in Communist political structures. This lack of anti-communist political leaders and experts became painfully obvious during the 1996–2000 period, when the lack of political and governing experience of the anti-communist opposition exacerbated the country's serious economic problems and thereby cemented the ex-Communists'

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<sup>4</sup> Figures are based on author's calculations based on data from the Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (1990–1997).

Table 3  
Ideological sources of party votes

2000	Communist (%)	Social democracy (%)	Liberal (%)	Christian democracy (%)	Nationalist (%)	DK (%)	None (%)
<i>A – 2000 elections</i>							
PSD	4	57	2	2	1	17	16
PD	0	50	4	18	3	15	10
PNL	1	9	70	4	1	6	10
CDR	1	8	11	57	1	7	14
PRM	3	20	4	6	33	10	23
UDMR	1	8	22	13	4	26	21
Other	7	41	8	8	5	15	15
Undec	3	14	8	5	2	22	46
NV	3	5	9	3	2	22	54
Total	3	32	11	7	5	16	24
<i>2004</i>							
<i>B – 2004 elections</i>							
PSD	2	68	2	4	1	12	11
PNL/PD	1	13	52	10	2	6	15
PNTCD	5	5	0	59	3	23	5
PRM	9	14	5	11	21	21	20
UDMR	0	13	4	4	12	16	50
Other	5	27	2	43	18	0	5
Undec	1	26	13	9	3	13	35
NV	0	15	15	2	3	18	47
Total	2	34	20	8	4	12	21

reputation of managerial superiority. The widespread popular disappointment with Romania's first non-Communist-led government contributed to the implosion of the Christian Democratic National Peasants Party (PNT-CD) in 2000 and created a political vacuum on the non-nationalist right of the political spectrum and thus offered the political opportunity for the PDs unexpected but tactically brilliant ideological transformation.

Third, even though Gorbachev-style Communist reformers were also marginalized under Ceaușescu, their marginalization actually conferred them a significant degree of political legitimacy and enabled them to distance themselves from the highly unpopular legacy of the Ceaușescu dictatorship, while at the same time appropriating many of its political themes. This legitimacy was further enhanced by the central and highly visible role of several Communist “dissidents” in the 1989 revolution and thereby blurred the line between victims and perpetrators. At the same time, however, such Communist reformers were not persecuted to nearly the same extent as anti-communist dissidents, which put them at a significant organizational advantage compared to the atomized anti-communist dissidents and contributed to their ability to take over power during the chaotic early days of the Romanian revolution.

Finally, Ceaușescu's personal dictatorship weakened the institutional capacity of the ex-Communist Party, and thereby limited the degree of rank-and-file input into

party elite political decisions. In line with Grzymala-Busse's (2002) argument, such political autonomy of party elites facilitated the, sometimes excessive, flexibility of ex-Communists in adapting their electoral appeals to situational opportunities. This autonomy explains the fairly limited political fallout of even dramatic ideological orientations, such as the PD's shift from Social Democracy to Christian Democracy or the PRM's shift from extreme nationalism to Christian Democracy and back over the course of less than two years. Moreover, these opportunistic reorientations have so far carried minimal electoral costs as neither the PSD nor the PD were punished by voters following their respective ideological shifts, even though the public opinion data from the 2000 and 2004 elections (see Table 3) reveals a surprising ideological continuity and consistency among Romanian voters. Given the tension between the relative stability of popular attitudes and the fickleness of party ideological platforms, we should expect voters to begin to hold political parties more closely accountable for their electoral promises. Therefore, the electoral fortunes of Communist successor parties are likely to become even more dependent on their ability to produce political leaders with greater popular appeal than their non-Communist opponents – not exactly a long-term recipe for political success.

## Conclusions

This paper has analyzed the tortuous but ultimately very successful transformation of Romania's Communist successor parties, which were able to adapt to the extremely complicated political legacy of Ceaușescu's highly unpopular rule and spectacular downfall. Unlike in other East European countries, where Communist successor parties had straightforward institutional and personnel ties to the Communist Party and pursued broadly leftist electoral strategies (albeit displaying varying degree of ideology and pragmatism), the dissolution of the Romanian Communist Party created greater competition among its potential political heirs. Such competition redundant given the use of promoted afterwards promoted greater diversity among successor parties, which adapted different facets of Ceaușescu's political legacy and therefore expanded their political reach beyond the traditional confines of ex-Communist parties. This diversity highlights the multi-dimensional nature of Communist successor parties, and therefore hopefully contributes to a more nuanced definition and theoretical understanding of these parties.

The implications of the remarkable diversity and adaptability of Communist successor parties for Romania's democratic development are mixed; on the one hand they allowed parties associated with the old regime to dominate post-communist politics to a greater extent than if they had been confined to the left of the ideological spectrum, and their frequent ideological shifts probably contributed to the pervasive public distrust in political institutions and particularly political parties. On the other hand, given the weakness of Romania's anti-communist opposition, the political diversity of successor parties arguably fostered greater political competition in a manner reminiscent of the transitologists' discussion of the importance of rifts between hard-liners and reformers in authoritarian regimes (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986). While such competition among ex-Communists obviously raises

concerns of collusion and cartelization, the significant personal rivalries among individual leaders, along with the growing ideological differences in their platforms have so far precluded such an outcome and, according to Frye (2002), Romania is actually among the ex-Communist countries with greater partisan policy swings.

Finally, it is worth briefly to consider the theoretical implications of the present discussion for our understanding of the impact of Communist successor parties on post-communist politics. While several earlier studies have emphasized that the relationship to the Communist past constitutes a crucial cleavage in post-Communist Party politics (Tucker, 2006; Grzymala-Busse, 2007), the Romanian case suggests a somewhat more complicated relationship due to the uneven and multi-dimensional nature of the political continuity between the Communist Party and its post-communist successors. On the one hand, the prominent role of institutional heirs of the Communist successor *National Salvation Front* on both sides of the debate about condemning the crimes of the Communist regime suggests a gradual dilution of the ideological legacies which initially set former Communists apart from their anti-communist opponents. On the other hand, what still sets successor parties apart from their non-Communist counterparts – especially from pre-Communist “historical” parties like the PNL and the PNT-CD – is their greater ideological flexibility and opportunism and their heavier reliance on individual leader appeals. Given the relative weakness of the non-Communist parties, this practice, which is reinforced by the frequent instances of party switching, splits and mergers, has resulted in a type of political dynamics that still resemble the personality-based factionalism of Communist-era politics at least as much as the democratic ideal of programmatic party competition.

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### List of party acronyms

- ApR: *Alianța pentru România* (Alliance for Romania).
- DA: *Dreptate și Adevăr* (Truth and Justice).
- FDSN: *Frontul Democratic al Salvării Naționale* (Democratic National Salvation Front).
- FSN: *Frontul Salvării Naționale* (National Salvation Front).
- KSČM: *Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy* (Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia).
- MSZP: *Magyar Szocialista Párt* (Hungarian Socialist Party).
- PCR: *Partidul Comunist Român* (Romanian Communist Party).
- PD: *Partidul Democrat* (Democratic Party).
- PD-L: *Partidul Democrat-Liberal* (Democratic Liberal Party).
- PNL: *Partidul Național Liberal* (National Liberal Party).
- PNȚ-CD: *Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat* (Christian Democratic National Peasants Party).
- PSD: *Partidul Social Democrat* (Social-Democratic Party).
- PSDR: *Partidul Social Democrat din România* (Social-Democratic Party of Romania).
- PSM: *Partidul Social al Muncii* (Socialist Work Party).
- SLD: *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (Democratic Left Alliance).